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*Frontiers of Reason: On Epistemology and Mystery*

MICHAEL CRAIG RHODES

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Thesis submitted for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

University of Durham  
Department of Theology

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### *Abstract*

This thesis has two parts. The first part is a development of Dionysius the Areopagites' theophanic notion of being, what I call his notion of the mystery of being-as-ikon, in relation to his epistemology and theory of language. The second part is an application of this notion to certain epistemological and linguistic issues in western philosophy. The purpose of the thesis is to develop a Dionysian philosophical theology through the notion of being-as-ikon in dialogue with western philosophy.



*Declaration*

I hereby confirm that I have not previously submitted this thesis, or any portion thereof, for a degree in this or in any other University.

Signature: 

Date: 05.06.04

### *Acknowledgements*

I acknowledge my debt to my academic supervisor, Prof. Andrew Louth and to various 'readers', in particular Dr. Simon James and Fr./Dr. Melchisedec <sup>TERBONEN</sup> ~~(F. Terbonen)~~. Furthermore, though I have used various translations of Denys' writings in my research, the texts which appear in the thesis are my own translations from the De Gruyter critical edition, often done with Luibheid's translation as an aid. Thus, any translation errors are entirely my own.

### *Abbreviations*

<i>CD</i>	<i>Corpus Dionysiacum</i>
<i>DN</i>	<i>Divine Names</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Celestial Hierarchy</i>
<i>EH</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical Hierarchy</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Mystical Theology</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistles</i>

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Henry Edward Rhodes, Jr.  
11 March, 1949 – 19 February, 2001

ἀιωνία ἡ μνήμη

## *Prolegomena*

The great thing is that there is a mystery here, that the fleeting aspects of earth and eternal Truth have come into contact here.

Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

### *1. General Overview*

This thesis is a development of a Dionysian philosophical theology which focuses, primarily, on Denys' theophanic notion of being, what I refer to as Dionysius' notion of 'being-as-ikon'. I examine his position in the first two chapters (Part I), and then apply the notion of being-as-ikon in the following chapters (Part II) as a favorable interpretation of certain related issues in western philosophy. This allows me to address the following problems, presented here in a broadly construed manner: the problem of varieties of mystery (as I shall call it), the problem of the relationship between theistic proof and theology (which I also treat cursorily in the final section of chapter One), the problem of the relationship between science and theology and the problem of the relationship between language and theology.

The notion that emerges as a central element of my examination of Denys' thought, and of my application of his thought to western philosophy is, as has been stated, that of 'being-as-ikon'. What, then, is implied by this term?

### *2. The Mystery of Being-as-Ikon*

For Denys 'being' (*οὐσία*) is rational, empirical, and linguistic. He does not directly define 'ikon' (*εἰκών*), but in accordance with his usage, I define it as follows: 'ikon is an image which itself contains as a unity-in-distinction that of which it is an image.' The notion of being-as-ikon, therefore, implies that rational, empirical and linguistic being, distinct from each other and from their archetype, contain in themselves the unity of their archetype. For Denys, to put it differently, being-as-ikon affirms that the beyond-being is fully present in being, but it is not being and being is not beyond-being. The notion of being-as-ikon, furthermore, whenever it is used in this thesis shall, therefore, imply a double mystery, as it



were, a mystery of being, on the one hand, and a mystery of beyond-being, on the other.

### *3. The Mystery of Being-as-Ikon and Western Philosophy*

In terms of applying the notion of being-as-ikon to western philosophy, I shall here offer the general structure of my argument. I assume that each of the positions that I treat reveals, in some sense, the mystery of being. If these positions do reveal the mystery of being, then the mystery of being, as I take it, refers us to Denys' conception of being, and can, therefore, be understood through the notion of being-as-ikon. It is my contention, therefore, that the notion of being-as-ikon, in general, and the notion of rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon, more specifically, provides a plausible approach to doing philosophical theology.

#### *3.1. A Brief Look at the 'Philosophical' Chapters*

The first issue that I treat in the third chapter concerns, as was noted above, the variety of claims of mystery in contemporary western philosophy. I look, specifically, at three claims of mystery regarding 'mind', 'matter' and 'language', reflecting my primary interests in Dionysian thought, offered, respectively, by Colin McGinn, Shimon Malin and Martin Heidegger. This chapter is a brief foray that is intended as a defense of the kataphatic aspect of Denys' thought, namely its kataphasis as regards the mystery of being conceived of in terms of being-as-ikon.

Furthermore, using Descartes' 'ontological' proof, I apply Denys' position to the issue of *a priori* proof for the existence of God in chapter Four. My approach to Descartes' Fifth Meditation is critical, but, given a Dionysian context, I ultimately see his 'proof' in a favorable light by arguing for an apophatic conception of his reasoning in the Fifth Meditation, generally, and of his 'ontological' argument, specifically. As such, this chapter, therefore, is a defense of Denys' notion of rational-ikon, i.e. the rational component of being-as-ikon.

I apply Denys' position, in the next chapter, to a notion of the sense of the beautiful, which I develop using Steven Weinberg and Werner Heisenberg's

treatments of beauty in science. The intent here is to argue for an apophatic conception of the sense of the beautiful as applied to the work of science, and to offer, therefore, a defense of Denys' notion of empirical-ikon, i.e. the empirical component of being-as-ikon.

The last chapter is an application of Denys' thought to Merleau-Ponty's claim that linguistic meaning is silence. I accept Merleau-Ponty's theory of language, in general, and his theory of meaning, more particularly, and to it I apply Denys' theory of apophasis. The interest of the chapter is, therefore, to offer a defense of Denys' notion of language-as-ikon, i.e. the linguistic component of being-as-ikon.

Part II of this thesis, then, suggests that an epistemology which approaches the cosmos *via* the notion of being-as-ikon, specifically in terms of rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon, provides a context within which to deal meaningfully and responsibly with discernable limitations of reason, while avoiding the slippery slope of utter mysticism. Such an epistemology recognizes and affirms the nebulous nature of being, namely that it is at once strictly linguistic, rational and empirical, yet beyond language, reason and sense-data as well, i.e. it affirms the role of the mystery of being-as-ikon in the knowledge process. Furthermore, it is a defense of being-as-ikon in a western philosophical context that offers a Dionysian response to the positions examined by delineating the epistemological implications of this notion, particularly with regard to rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon.

### *3.2. Rational-Ikon, Empirical-Ikon and Language-as-Ikon*

When I refer to a *rational, empirical or linguistic* ikon, therefore, I refer to a certain element of being which is derived either from mind, matter or language and, understood in terms of being-as-ikon, seems to convey both the mystery of being and the mystery of beyond-being, either in a kataphatic manner (as with chapter Three) or in an apophatic manner (as with chapters Four-Six).



#### *4. Conclusion*

Gabriel Marcel's distinction between 'mystery' (or the 'meta-problematical') and 'problem' might be a heuristic one for us at this point. The former he defines as follows: "A mystery is a problem which encroaches upon its own data, invading them, as it were, and thereby transcending itself as a simple problem." As examples he sites "the union of the body and soul", "the problem of evil", "love", "an encounter which has left a deep and lasting trace." "To postulate the meta-problematical" Marcel argues, "is to postulate the primacy of being over knowledge. . .to recognize that knowledge is, as it were, environed by being. . ."<sup>1</sup> Revising Marcel's terminology just slightly, it could be said that Denys' position postulates the primacy of being over knowledge in a certain refined sense: namely as the primacy of being-*as-ikon* over knowledge. Thus, for Denys, it is the mystery of being-*as-ikon* which 'encroaches upon and invades its own data', and therefore, 'environs knowledge'.

Let us turn, now, to an examination of the *CD* to see how it is that being-*as-ikon*, for Denys, 'environs knowledge.'

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<sup>1</sup> "On the Ontological Mystery" in *The Philosophy of Existence*, trans. Manya Harari (London; The Harvill Press, 1948), 8-9.

*PART I*

*Denys' Mystery of Being-as-Ikon*

*Knowledge, Being and Ikon: Kataphasis in Denys' Epistemology*

*1. Introduction*

'In him we live and move and have our being' (Acts. 17.28). Dionysius, purportedly, heard these words preached by St. Paul at the Areopagus. And although scholarly opinion does not accept that the Dionysius whose writings shall here concern us was the Dionysius of whom St. Luke speaks in the final verse of chapter seventeen, this notion seems, nevertheless, to be a fitting place at which to begin our analysis of the *Corpus Dionysiacum* because, whoever the author of these texts is, he seems to have been captivated by just such a vision, namely that 'in him we live and move and have our being.'

The mystery of which St. Paul speaks is a great one. It would, indeed, be quite marvelous and awe-inspiring if he meant only that God is the cosmos, and that since we make our home in it, then we therefore live and move in him. However interesting this position might be, it is nevertheless not in agreement with what St. Paul intends to convey. That which he intends to convey here is a mystery of such greatness that it is, ultimately, unknowable and indescribable, as he himself says elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> It is *not*, however, a mystery about which *nothing at all* can be known and said.

Denys' epistemology seems to capture this aspect of the mystery of God. For him, there is a burden which being bears, a tension with which intellect contends, concerning two distinct and seemingly separate modes of reality: the empirical and rational, on the one hand, and the *trans*-empirical and *trans*-rational, on the other. This chapter deals with Denys' epistemological method of rational apprehension of the reality of God: it treats the issue of knowing at least somewhat about a mystery that at the end of the day is utterly inconceivable and unknowable. Such a task cannot fail to at least seem like a fruitless endeavor, but Denys seems to provide quite an ergonomic epistemology, blazing an apparently

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Rom. 11.33-36.

sure but precarious trail along the precipice of senselessness, his great strength being, in my opinion, that he seems never to fall.

His method is discernible within the context of the procession and return of the beyond-being; it has two crucial parts, the rational (or *a priori*) and the empirical (or *a posteriori*), and, as opposed to the later aspect of unknowing, is exclusively bound within the confines of reason and sense-perception. It is a method of rational apprehension of God that is, therefore, fundamentally empirical<sup>2</sup> and rational, but not in a philosophical sense of being, on the one hand, a construct of a strict empiricist, or, on the other hand, a construct of a strict rationalist. Denys' method has as its locus of investigation the empirical-rational mode of reality, but is ultimately concerned with something quite other than and distinct from this cosmos and its mode of reality. Put differently, it is a *cosmo*-centric method, but has as its ultimate *telos* the cosmic-Cause.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge, for Denys, is always consequent, therefore, to the unknown and unknowable, yet the process of knowing is anterior to that of unknowing.

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<sup>2</sup> The term "empirical", as defined by *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 226, means "Based on experience. An idea or concept is empirical if it is derived ultimately from the five senses, to which introspection is sometimes added. . . the data supplied by the senses may need to be processed by the mind, and indeed may not count as data at all until some activity by the mind has taken place." And regarding empirical language: "A statement, proposition, or judgment is empirical if we can only know its truth or falsity by appealing to experience, but it can contain empirical concepts without being itself empirical. *Red* is an empirical concept, but 'Red is a colour' is not empirical: we do not find its truth by looking." The subject of Denys' empirical investigations is one that is itself utterly *non*-empirical; so his method is empirical only because it requires empirical data; but it is *not* empirical in that it uses processed sensory data for the purpose of making inferences and knowledge claims about something (i.e., God) which is not in any way an empirical object. Furthermore, Denys' method is *not* empirical in the sense that all the data with which the mind must deal is given as sensory data; his position requires input from the thing (i.e., God) with which the method is primarily concerned: i.e., revelation.

<sup>3</sup> "[I]f indeed we may speak of goal or ending. . . this infinite goal is not a nature or an essence, nor is it a person; it is something which transcends all notion both of nature and of person: it is the Trinity" in Vladimir Lossky's *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: S.V.S., 1976), 44.

## 2. *Being and Knowing*

What is knowledge? When it is said 'I know that *x*' what is being referred to by means of the verb 'to know'? We shall turn here to the *CD* to aid us in trying to develop a Dionysian response to this line of questioning.

In *DN* I, 4, 593A, Denys says this: "For if all knowledge is of beings and has its limit in beings, then that beyond all being and all knowledge is transcendent (*ἐξηρημένη*)."<sup>4</sup> Whatever else knowledge might be, then, it is at least, for Denys, 'of beings' and 'has its limit in beings.' Between knowing and being, there is then, for Denys, a close relation: 'knowledge' (*γνώσις*) and 'to know' (*γινώσκω*) are taken to refer exclusively to the realm of caused things, i.e. the 'cosmos' –the *αἰτιατός* ('caused thing') of the *αἰτία* ('cause'). Denys' use of 'knowledge' or 'to know' to refer to anything beyond being is, therefore, always qualified. The preposition *ὑπέρ* ('above', 'beyond') or the adverb *ἐπέκεινα* ('beyond') is commonly used, distinguishing between 'knowing', on the one hand, and 'knowing beyond all knowledge', on the other, to refer to that which is beyond knowledge and being; *ἄγνοσία* ('unknowing'), or some variant thereof (e.g. *γνώσις ἢ δι' ἄγνοσίας*<sup>5</sup>), is also common.<sup>5</sup> That which is being is that which is (or can be) known. Knowing: *of* being, *in* being. The sole subject matter of knowledge, for Denys, is being, and the limit of the function of knowledge is being. A response to the question 'What is knowledge?' must treat to some extent, then, the nature of being. Thus: how does Denys understand the notion of being?

In making this reference, he uses a few Greek terms, which while not being synonyms are often semantically interchangeable.<sup>6</sup> The term that he uses most often is *οὐσία*, the first appearance of which in *DN* occurs in 588A with two variations in usage: 'For it [God] is beyond word, mind and being (*οὐσίαν*):

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<sup>4</sup> *DN* VII.3.872a.

<sup>5</sup> See next chapter.

<sup>6</sup> Eg., *τὸ εἶναι* ; *τὸ ὄν*. 'the being,' 'that which is'; *τὰ ὄντα*. 'the beings', 'those which are'; *ὄν*. 'being', 'that which is'.

unknowing beyond being (*ὑπερουσιότατος*).’ Just below this passage, in 588B, Denys uses the same term in a similar manner: ‘the beyond-being (*ὑπερούσιος*) infinity is above beings (*τῶν οὐσιῶν*).’ More specifically, he speaks of God as ‘the beyond-being being’ (588B, 13-14), and similarly: ‘but it is not being, as it is beyond all being’ (588B, 16). But in 589B, we read: ‘Therefore, because it (the First Cause) is the ground, origin, being (*οὐσία*) and life of all things, . . .,’ in which case Denys seems to use the term being, without a qualifying term such as *ὑπέρ*, as a referent for God. And in 593C, he plainly suggests that it would be problematic ‘to praise’ God as ‘being’, yet that ‘since it is the ground of all being’ it ‘must be praised from all created things’ (593C). (‘Praise’ (*ὑμνέω*), then, is also closely connected to knowledge.) In 645A, Denys touches on this point again: ‘Therefore if we name the beyond-being, hidden God either ‘Life’, ‘Being’ ‘Light’ or ‘Word,’ we are discerning nothing other than activities (either deifying, creating (being), granting life or giving wisdom) proceeding from it to us’ (*DN*, II, 7, 645A). Denys uses the notion of the Sun as an analogy to express the manner in which these activities come ‘from it to us’: ‘by existing it (the Sun) gives light to all to partake of its light, according to the proper logical faculties of each’ (*DN*, IV, 1, 693B). Thus do the activities of the beyond-being ‘proceed from it to us’; yet Denys carefully distinguishes the Good as being beyond the Sun: ‘the Good is beyond the sun transcendentally, as the archetype beyond an indistinct ikon’ (693B). The beyond-being proceeding to being as the light of the Sun proceeding to being: Denys’ careful distinction is an implicit recognition of the inherent rational weakness of such an analogy, the main point of which being the fact that the Sun itself would be part of the realm of being which it is lighting, whereas the beyond-being is itself emphatically not part of the realm of being into which it proceeds.<sup>7</sup> “It is not a question of understanding the Good on the basis of the sun, but of situating this impossible relation within the distance of Goodness, and therefore of admitting that the light of the sun would have no right to the

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<sup>7</sup> cf. *DN*, IV, 4, 697b-c.

iconography of the Requisite, if it did not come to us from the Requisite as a gift; "for light comes from the Goodness, and therefore finds itself to be an icon of [the distance of] Goodness." Not to name the unthinkable in the image of the world, but indeed to receive the world as an icon of God –to relate the world back to Him."<sup>8</sup>

In 696C-D, the notion of being is qualified a bit more precisely in terms of itself rather than in comparison to the beyond-being: 'But also if we must speak concerning these things, of the irrational souls, both of living things which fly in the air and those which walk upon the earth as well as those which dwell within the earth and the ones that live in the waters, or those having an amphibian-like lot, and those which have been called to live under the earth, and ...'<sup>9</sup> Denys' understanding of being includes rational as well as irrational animals, plants and inanimate matter. Knowledge then is *of* animals (both rational as well as irrational), plants and matter; and knowledge *has its limit in* animals, plants and matter.<sup>10</sup>

In 705D-708A, it is said that 'all things, whatever is and whatever becomes, is and becomes through the Beautiful and the Good. All things look to it, and are moved and maintained by it. . .all beings (*τὰ ὄντα*) are from the Beautiful and the Good. . .Therefore all things are aiming for, desiring and loving the Beautiful and the Good.' Being then has a certain inherent relational-communal aspect: it is from the Beautiful and the Good, and aims for, desires and loves the Beautiful and the Good. The nature of being is understood through the activities of the beyond-being, which Denys seems wont to express by means of the Sun analogy (used again in 697C-D). By means of having been created, and

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<sup>8</sup> Marion *The Idol and the Distance* (Fordham, New York: 2001), 178. Quote from *DN*, IV, 4, 697 b-c. Marion's rendering of the Greek *αἰτία* with the French *Requisit*, which Carlson maintains as *Requisite*, insightfully captures Denys' notion that being having come from this Cause requires it for the purpose of returning to it (cf. Carlson's note 21, 151). Marion's notion of distance remains by his own admission necessarily undefined.

<sup>9</sup> See also *Ep.* IX.

<sup>10</sup> It should not be understood that Denys' theory of knowledge is of a solely empirical sort. For example, in 980c-d he speaks of number as being as well.

by means of being preserved, each being has an innate connection with the Beautiful and the Good. Denys seems to understand this as a sort of faculty or ability (whether actively or passively employed): each being by means of being a being naturally acts as an ikon of the Beautiful and the Good. For this reason it would seem that certainty as a philosophical bench-mark for truth is a goal that could never be properly achieved, according to Dionysian thought: to know a being certainly would be also to know certainly that to which it by nature relates and communes –the beyond-being Beautiful and Good. As the Sun is a 'dim ikon' of the beyond-being, so too is each instance of being, and as such each being stands in readiness to be known in relation to its Cause.

### *2.1. Being-as-Ikon*

Being is all animals, plants and matter, and whether a being is *known* or is acting as *knower*, it stands in relation to its Cause as Its ikon. Knowledge, then, is being *as ikon of the beyond-being* in communion with being *as ikon of the beyond-being*: it is a self-giving communion. It is a communion because in this dynamic act of knowing the beyond-being gives itself *to and through knower and known*, the known-being gives itself to be known and the knowing-being gives itself to know: the process is defined by an interdependent, cooperative participation. Both the knowing-being as ikon as well as the known-being as ikon participate in this process. The Cause and Purpose of this process is the beyond-being Beautiful (and Good, 704B). As ikon, each being participates in Beauty, and by means of participating is itself beautiful, the process of participation being 'beauty.'<sup>11</sup> Hence, to know is to participate (commune) with the beyond-being, by means of the unique ikonic capacity of each being: an epistemology of beauty, as it were (cf. 701C-704C). Hence, 'I know that *x*' would, for Denys, seem to mean: 'As knowing-being-as-ikon I participate with the Beauty of the beyond-being by means of the beauty of the known-being-as-ikon.'

#### *2.1.1. Rational-Being-as-Ikon and Empirical-Being-as-Ikon*

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<sup>11</sup> I deal with the notion of beauty below more thoroughly in section five.



If being is inherently ikon, then the ikon nature of being is dual: empirical and rational. In often speaking of 'things of perception', *τὰ αἰσθητά*, and 'things of reason', *τὰ νοητά*, Denys seems also to accept a hierarchy of being. At the beginning of *DN*, the rational (*τὰ νοητά*) is spoken of as being 'unapproachable' and 'unobservable' by means of perceptions (*τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς*): empirical being is, in its own way, hierarchically prior to rational being (cf. 588B). And if being is hierarchically ikon, *κατ'ἀναλογίαν* ('according to capacity'), whether empirical or rational, then knowledge too is, on the one hand, of both *τὰ αἰσθητά* (the empirical) and of *τὰ νοητά* (the rational), and (therefore) hierarchical, on the other: participation with the Beauty of the beyond being by means of the beauty of the known-being would be *hierarchically* beautiful (because it participates in beauty) in both an empirical as well as a rational manner. Denys' theory of knowledge, then, would be neither solely empirical, nor solely rational. As ikon of being, which is ikon of the beyond-being, knowledge as such would ikonify the nature of that with which it communes (being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being), and as such would be both rationally and empirically beautiful. Thus, it would seem that knowledge of/in being, as communion with beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-Beauty-beyond-being, is knowledge of/in both empirical and rational being, as communion with beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-Beauty-beyond-being. The more philosophically acceptable way of putting this, post Kant, might be to say that Denys' theory of knowledge would seem to be both *a posteriori* as well as *a priori* -with an emphasis on beauty, hierarchy and ikon. (This theory of knowledge, then, is exclusively rational and empirical in the sense that it does not transcend reason and experience; it functions firmly within the realm of the rational and the empirical *though its main influence and inspiration remains other than either the empirical or the rational* –as noted in the Prolegomena).

#### *2.1.1.1. Being-as-Ikon as Gift of the Beyond-Being*

The *CH* opens with a quote from the Epistle of James, "*ὁ ἀδελφότης*" (*DN*, III, 3, 681d): *«Πᾶσα δόσις ἀγαθὴ καὶ πᾶν δῶρημα τέλειον ἄνωθέν ἐστι*

καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων.» ('Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, *coming down from* the Father of lights.')<sup>12</sup> Here we have a good expression of what might be called an 'epistemic limit' that is operative in patristic philosophy: *καταβαῖνον ἀπὸ τοῦ πατρὸς τῶν φώτων*. The capacities of *reason* (both 'pure' and 'practical'), *experience* (both direct and indirect), and *language* (syntax, semantics and pragmatics) are employed as 'gifts from above,' within the context of the 'coming down from the Father of lights.' This 'coming down,' is inherent both in the nature of these gifts (thus, 'perfect' being understood in the sense of 'relatively perfect') and in the nature of the subjects with which these gifts consort. The cosmos –i.e. all being– is a personal and intimate context within which God can be known. Denys speaks of it as the procession (*προόδος*)<sup>13</sup> of God from the unity of beyond-being to the distinction of being. St. James is here referring to God's activity of intimately relating himself by means of being Cause of all being: procession is a sort of *love-ethic*, effecting being and the respective epistemic, empirical and linguistic 'gifts.' The procession of the beyond-being is the cause of being, and thus of knowledge, the source of which is the beyond-being-eros.<sup>14</sup> Speaking to this issue, Denys says this:

even the Cause of all things itself, because of an extraordinary character (superabundance) of goodness for all things, loves all things, makes all things, perfects all things, holds together all things, returns all things, even that the divine

<sup>12</sup> CH I 120b(1-2). Italics mine. St Denys often makes reference to Holy Scripture: «τινα κανόνα κάλλιστον ἀληθείας» (640b, 9). As an admonition for doing so, see DN II 640b(8-12). Cf. Js. 1.17.

<sup>13</sup> cf. Proclus' henotheism in his *Elements of Theology*, trs. E. R. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), Prop. 113-165(101-145), especially 116; in the latter, Proclus argues that "the One is imparticipable."

<sup>14</sup> cf. S. Gersh *From Iamblicus to Eriugena* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 17-113 and 193-288. These two sections are a study of Neo-Platonic and Christian Neo-Platonic thought, respectively, wherein the notions of 'procession' and 'return' figure prominently.

desire is Good of Good on account of the good. For the Good-working desire<sup>15</sup> of all things itself, by means of the Good (according to its extraordinary character) did not permit itself to remain in itself without issue: but it was urged to produce according to (its) productive extraordinary character for all things (DN IV 708b).<sup>16</sup>

But also one must venture beyond truth to say this: that even the cause of all things itself with a beautiful and good desire for all things, on account of an extraordinary character of benign desire, is carried outside of himself by means of the forethought<sup>17</sup> he has for all beings (712B).

The beyond-being proceeds by means of what seems to be an internal necessity that is at the same time a free action. St. Denys uses the present, active, indicative to convey the processive actions; but he uses the aorist to speak of the *eros* not remaining in itself alone.<sup>18</sup> The actualization of the 'eros' which is interior to the Good,<sup>19</sup> is conceived of as a temporally unique and distinct past action, as opposed to the continued present processive action. In this way, St. Denys seems to be attempting to convey the unalterable essential nature of God and the free

<sup>15</sup> "Note that one must not ascribe to God inconsistent names, unless indeed they be contained in the divine Scripture, as even now he says concerning 'eros.'" John of Scythopolis *Scholia* 261.4 in Paul Rorem and John C. Lamoreaux *John of Scythopolis and the Dionysian Corpus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1998), 206. See also DN IV 708c-709a and note 150 in Luibheid and Rorem, 80. Here Denys says 'It would be irrational and silly, as I see it, to not look at the power of the meanings, but at the words only' (708c, 3-4); and DN 709b-712b. See also Hieromonk Alexander Golitzin *Et Introibo Ad Altare Dei* (Θεσσαλονίκη: Πατριάχικον Ιδρύμα Πατέρικων Μελέτων, 1994), 61ff note 168; and 82. See also Ysable De Andia *Henosis: L'Union À Dieu Chez Denys L'Aréopagite* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1996), 145-64. «L'amour est la puissance de génération au sein du Bien.» And Louth *Denys*, 94-6.

<sup>16</sup> Παύρησιάζεται δὲ καὶ τοῦτο εἰπεῖν ὁ ἀληθὴς λόγος, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ πάντων αἴτιος δι' ἀγαθότητος ὑπερβολὴν πάντων ἐρᾷ, πάντα ποιεῖ, πάντα τελειοῖ, πάντα συνέχει, πάντα ἐπιστρέφει, καὶ ἔστι καὶ θεὸς ἔρως ἀγαθὸς ἀγαθοῦ διὰ τὸ ἀγαθόν. Αὐτὸς γὰρ ὁ ἀγαθοεργὸς πῶν ὄντων ἔρως ἐν τάχαθ' ὑπερβολὴν προϋπάρχων οὐκ εἴασεν αὐτὸν ἄγονον ἐν ἑαυτῷ μένειν, ἐκίνησε δὲ αὐτὸν εἰς τὸ πρακτικεῦσθαι κατὰ τὴν ἀπάντων γεννητικὴν ὑπερβολήν. Cf. Andia, op cit., «Le Divin Amour.»; Golitzin, op cit., 66.

<sup>17</sup> This is more literal; Luibheid has *loving care* for 'ταῖς προνοίαις'; normally taken as 'providence'. Here 'fore thought' seems to capture Denys' notion of movement a bit more clearly.

<sup>18</sup> cf. Golitzin, loc cit.

<sup>19</sup> De Andia, loc cit., «L'ultime audace de Denys est de montrer que le «divin amour» est intérieur au Bien.»

processive activities: his freedom of action is defined by his essential nature.<sup>20</sup> Thus, to use different terminology, this paradoxical conception could be put like this: the necessary nature of God necessarily effects the *free* activities of God's erotic procession.<sup>21</sup> The latter passage makes an important point about God being 'carried outside of himself' in the procession. St. Denys' purpose is to distinguish the unity of God (as God is in himself) from the manifold differentiations of his processive activities. For Denys, the focus of the knowledge process seems to be the rational and empirical discernability of such manifold differentiations –to know the manifestation of the beyond-being in/through being.<sup>22</sup> The *procession* of the beyond-being is an action of free relation to and free communion with being, being completely unified but effecting distinct instantiations:<sup>23</sup> the movement of the beyond-being from union (the thearchic union of three in one<sup>24</sup>) to distinction. This is not a theoretical paradigm, an idea or some kind of semantic play, for Denys; it is an action on the part of the beyond-being, which implicates an array of spatio-temporal activities.<sup>25</sup>

Expressing this notion, Denys uses an analogy, comparing the nature of a circle with the intimate action of the beyond-being in procession.

<sup>20</sup> Dom Illtyd Trethowan says this: "God is not, if we are to speak properly, free to choose. . . 'possible worlds'. . . is anthropomorphic. God's plan for creation is what it is because he is who he is. This is freedom in the fullest, most positive sense. . . God is super-generous love" in his "Irrationality in Theology and the Palamite Distinction" *Eastern Churches Review* 10 (1977), 21. In a discussion on the question of God's "agency or will" in the creative process, Golitzin also uses Trethowan, op cit., 83 and note 51.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Golitzin, op cit., 59-61 and 66-70, esp. 56: "Dionysius uses this term to signify the presence of God as "outside" his essence. Its use in the singular refers to the unified quality of the procession as a single out-flowing, as well as to the unity of its source. The plural usages doubtless point to the varied effects to which the procession gives rise, and to the multiple causes (αἰτίαι) of the creatures. " "God in relation is God in his προόδοι." (*Ibid.*, 83).

<sup>22</sup> cf. John D. Zizioulas *Being as Communion* (Crestwood, NY: 1993), 91; "ekstasis" (standing outside) is a result of God's *eros* (desire) 'responding' to the created order.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Golitzin, op cit., 47 for a brief discussion of similarities between St Denys and Neo-Platonism on this point. Cf. Proclus, op cit., Props. 25-39 (29-43), 56-65(55-63), especially Props. 62(59) and 64(61). See also Props. 100-3(91-3)

<sup>24</sup> "as a monad or henad, because of its supernatural simplicity and indivisible unity" and "as a Trinity, for with transcendent fecundity it is manifested as 'three persons' (τῇν τρισυπόστατον)" as grounded in Scripture (cf. *DNI* 589D-592A).

<sup>25</sup> Golitzin, op cit., 62. See also note 133; and Proclus, op cit., Prop. 87(81), 48-9(49), 52(51), 55(53), 33 (37).

By means of the Divine desire is shown especially both the unending and unbeginning as a kind of eternal circle<sup>26</sup> ... always both proceeding, remaining and being restored to itself.<sup>27</sup>

In procession, the beyond-being as transcendent and as immanent are connected by the tenuous thread of space-time: the 'divine circle' speaks concurrently of the non-spatial and timeless unity of the transcendent as well as the spatial and temporal duration of the immanent. Thus, it both always is, yet always is becoming.

#### *2.1.1.2. Cosmos as Ikon of the Cause of the Cosmos*

How does such a position affect the way that the cosmos is to be understood? Denys' reasoning in response to such a question could be formulated as follows. Assume<sup>28</sup> that this cosmic order is eternally what it is. First, this assumption would at least imply that the cosmos is necessary. If it is necessary, then it exists by means of itself. Secondly, it would seem also to imply that space-time is necessary. If space-time is necessary, then it is self-existent. Each of these cases would imply, respectively, that the cosmos and space-time are on a metaphysical par with the beyond-being.<sup>29</sup> Such reasoning would be untenable for Denys because in such a context, there would be no procession. There is evidence of procession. Therefore, the cosmos is contingent. Hence, procession does not imply the eternity (supra spatio-temporality) of the cosmos. God's procession effects the cosmos to the end that he might be discursively discerned within it and

<sup>26</sup> ὡς περ τις αἰδῖος κύκλος

<sup>27</sup> Italics mine. DN IV 712d-713a; having been 'shown' (ὡς ἀπαγγέλλεται) by 'our illustrious one' (ὁ κλεινὸς ἡμῶν) in his *Hymns of Yearning*, loc cit., 713A. On St Denys and Hierotheos, see I. P. Sheldon-Williams "The ps. Dionysius and the Holy Hierotheos," *Studia Patristica* 8, II (1966): 108-17. Cf. Proclus, op cit., Prop. 33 (37).

<sup>28</sup> cf. Proclus, op cit., Prop. 34(39) and 55(53). The cosmos, in the sense of being an everlasting duration, or 'perpetual process', is eternal.

<sup>29</sup> This turns out to be the case on pain of incoherence because if there are two self-existent and necessary things (God and the Cosmos) which are asserted as the source of the cosmos, then there

by means of it, not so that there is an ontological identity between God and the cosmos.

Denys has put it this way:

All the causes found in the divine scripture,<sup>30</sup> both of the unions and the distinctions,<sup>31</sup> each of which having been treated, as far as possible, by my account in my *Theological Representations*, I put forth, having unfolded<sup>32</sup> and expounded<sup>33</sup> these things by means of the true word<sup>34</sup>. . . For example, if to the *hyperousia* hiddenness we give the name of 'God,' or 'Life,' or 'Being' or 'Light' or 'Word,' then that which we are discerning is nothing other than guiding<sup>35</sup> activities from it for us, which deify, cause being, bear life, and grant wisdom. . . [T]his is the work of the divine Spirit, which is located beyond all conceptual incorporeality and all divinity, and also of the Father and the Son eminently transcendent of all divine fatherness and sonness. For there is no exact relationship<sup>36</sup> between the caused (things) and the causes; but, on the one hand, the caused (things) are in every possible way *ikons* of their causes; and, on the other hand, the causes themselves are transcendent<sup>37</sup> and established beyond<sup>38</sup> the caused (things), according to the logic of the source-relationship.<sup>39</sup> In this way also, joys and woes are said to be the cause of joy and woe in us, without themselves being the possessors of such feelings. Also, fire warms and burns, [but] is not said to be burned and warmed. And if someone said life itself lives or light itself is enlightened, according to my logic he has not spoken correctly, unless he says somewhere in some different manner [than at] first, so that the

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is an equality regarding the mode of *hyperaxis* and *ousia* of both, i.e.  $G = C$ . In other words, reason seems to require that there can only exist one *SE* and *N* being. See the discussion to follow.

<sup>30</sup> *δσας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις θεοπρεπεῖς*

<sup>31</sup> *ἐνώσεων, διακρίσεων*

<sup>32</sup> *ἀνελίσσαντες*

<sup>33</sup> *ἀναπτύξαντες*

<sup>34</sup> *τῷ ἀλήθει λόγῳ* -possibly a reference to 'scripture'?

<sup>35</sup> *προαγομένως*: 'proceeding'?

<sup>36</sup> *ἐμφύρεια*: 'likeness'.

<sup>37</sup> *ἐξήρηται*

<sup>38</sup> *ὑπερίδρυπται*

<sup>39</sup> *τῆς οὐκείας ἀρχῆς*

caused things are sufficiently and essentially in the causes beforehand (*DN* II, 644d-645d).

St. Denys goes to great length here, reinterpreting the notion of cause even in a spatio-temporal sense in effort to ensure that the cosmic-Cause is not mistakenly identified with the caused-cosmos.<sup>40</sup> Such an identity would implicitly result in the affirmation of the eternality of the cosmos, and it would imply the *being* of God (rather than the beyond-being of God). The emphasis here is on the mystery of what God really is, and thus on the mystery of the relationship between what he really is and what he actually causes; this type of mystery for St. Denys, is not merely theological in nature. There are psychological mysteries of this ilk: the question of the connection between what joy is and the experience of the feeling of joy. There are natural mysteries of the sort that St. Denys points out with 'fire' and 'light,' and there are biological mysteries ('life'). So whatever attributes the cosmos might exhibit, the Cause of the cosmos is none of these; though they might provide us with some information about the Cause, being ikons of it, yet the Cause itself is something other than these cosmic attributes. For St. Denys, as well as for other Greek Fathers, notably St. Athanasius, using temporal terminology is necessary not because in God there is a succession of time (e.g. action *a* precedes effect *b* and action *c*, *et cetera*) but because of the limits of our predicative abilities; these 'temporal' notions are used as 'notional icons'<sup>41</sup> to affirm an ontological, rather than a temporal, truth (and in this sense, they are used, as well, to affirm truth itself, i.e. the beyond-being).

### *3. Predication and Praise: Language-as-Ikon*

We turn now toward the role of language. Denys' theory of knowledge sets knowledge in an inherent relation with the beyond-being; so too does

<sup>40</sup> cf. Proclus, op cit., Prop. 11. Here, he says this (which I take to be the expression of a key notion for a Procline epistemology): «ἡ γὰρ τῶν αἰτίων γνώσις ἐπιστήμη ἐστὶν ἔργον, καὶ τότε λέγομεν ἐπίστασθαι ὅταν τὰ αἶτια γνωρίσωμεν τῶν ὄντων.» 'The work of science is knowing the causes, and then when we know the causes of beings do we claim to know.'

<sup>41</sup> Golitzin, op cit., 45-74.

language stand in such a relation.<sup>42</sup> Language in communion with knowledge-in-communion-with-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being bears therefore the same empirical and rational nature. As such, language, for Denys, could be used *synthetically* or *analytically*, as ikon of beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-Beauty-beyond-being: 'But now, as it is possible for us, we make use of whatever appropriate symbols for the Divine' (*DN* I, 4, 592c).<sup>43</sup> This notion of symbols, or ikons, incorporates the notion of a process of predication, which functions by means of *a priori analytic/synthetic* propositions, and *a posteriori synthetic* propositions.<sup>44</sup> The 'symbols' for the Divine, also exhibit a hierarchical structure as well: a hierarchy of kataphasis. It speaks with a dual hierarchical purpose: to speak *empirically* and *rationally* about the Beauty-beyond-being by means of beautiful-beings-as-ikons-of-beauty-beyond-being. And in so speaking, "the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated" (589d-592a) in a decidedly philosophic (and 'theosophic' *DN*, II, 2, 640a) sense. Thus, an inescapable tension exists in Denys' theory of language usage because that which is 'bound up' is, by nature, inexpressible, while that in which the inexpressible is bound is by nature expressible. The speaking of language is therefore a speaking that speaks what cannot be spoken by means of what can be spoken: 'bound up' within empirical and rational being is the beyond-being –that 'being', as it were, which is beyond the empirical and the rational, though bound by it. Speaking about the beyond-being in a demonstrative manner while the attempt is to achieve

<sup>42</sup> cf. Balthasar *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetic*, II, 172-78; and Marion, op cit., 180-95.

<sup>43</sup> I use Luijckheid and Rorem's rendering of 'οἰκεῖς... συμβόλοις' as 'whatever appropriate symbols' (53). «Νῦν δέ, ὥς ἡμῖν ἐφικτόν, οἰκεῖς μὲν εἰς τὰ θεῖα συμβόλοις χρώμεθα»

<sup>44</sup> A variety of propositional forms seems to play a role in this process: tautologies of the form 'All bachelors are unmarried men' (e.g., 'God is one'); axioms of the form 'All bodies are extended' (e.g., 'God is the Beautiful'); identity statements of the form ' $a = a$ ' (e.g., 'God is God'), or inferences of the form ' $(x)(Px \rightarrow P'x)$ ', or ' $(x)(Px \leftrightarrow P'x)$ ' (e.g., 'God is beautiful iff God is good' or 'if God is beautiful, then God is good'); laws of the form ' $(x)(Px \vee \neg Px)$ ' and ' $(x)(\neg(Px \wedge \neg Px))$ '<sup>44</sup> (e.g., 'Either God is light or God is not light' and 'It is not the case that God is both light and not light'); observations of the form 'All bodies have magnitude,' 'Socrates is a man,' 'Caesar crossed the Rubicon,' 'Kelsie is a child' (e.g., 'God is all in all', 'God is being-beyond-being', 'God became a man', 'God became Incarnate').



explicit clarity is partially a spoken silence by virtue of the beyond-being's being 'bound'.

Denys speaks to this distinction in *Ep. IX*:

There are two ways to the tradition of theology: on the one hand, the ineffable and mysterious, on the other the manifest and made-known; on the one hand symbolic and perfecting, and on the other the philosophical and demonstrative. Thus is the inexpressible bound up with what can be articulated.<sup>45</sup> The one persuades and proves the truth of its conclusions, but the other achieves and establishes [one] in [truth] by means of unteachable mysteries (1105d).<sup>46</sup>

If language is by nature ikon, then distinguishing between the 'ineffable' function of language, on the one hand, and the 'demonstrative,' on the other, speaks of the dual and inseparable nature of language. For as ikon it cannot but *be* as ikon-of-the-beyond-being; and as speaking ikon, it cannot but *speak of* being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being. As the human cannot be spiritual apart from the corporeal, nor corporeal apart from the spiritual, so too language cannot be ineffable apart from the demonstrative, nor demonstrative apart from the ineffable: taciturn in eloquence, and eloquent in being taciturn.

'In the *Divine Names* it was shown the *sense* in which 'Good,' 'Being,' 'Life,' 'Wisdom,' 'Power,' and whatever other (predicates) are *rational names* for God' (1033a) (*DN XIII* presents the predicates 'Perfect' and 'One' as being 'more enduring' than these). A philosophical process of predication, beginning with such *a priori* notions (*DN*, XIII, 2, 977c-984a), attempts to speak rigorously of the beyond-being as 'Good,' 'Life,' etc., *because* 'this 'One', 'Good' and 'Beautiful,' is uniquely the Cause of the multitudes of the good and the beautiful.' It speaks demonstratively as if in answer to an invitation to speak –because it has the responsibility to do so- of the ineffable by means of the effable (being). To speak

<sup>45</sup> *καὶ συμπλέκεται τῷ ῥητῷ τὸ ἀρρητό.*

<sup>46</sup> cf. Louth *Denys*, 24-6; Rorem, *op cit.*, 24-6.

of the beyond-being, therefore, is 'to praise' (*ὑμνεῖν*) it in two senses of the word: because language-as-ikon celebrates the beyond-being, and because it recites over and over the presence of the beyond-being.

After his lengthy discussion of the problem of evil, Denys turns (in chapter five of *DN*) to a discussion of the predicate 'being', distinguishing between *showing* and *praising*: 'Let us move to the theological name 'being', the true-being of the really-real. But we should remember that the focus of the discourse is not to show the beyond-being being as the beyond-being, for this is something beyond words, something unknown and wholly unrevealed, something above unity itself; but (the focus of our discourse is) to praise the being-making procession of the thearchic being-source into being' (*DN*, 5, 1, 816b). 'Not to show the beyond-being as the beyond-being' but 'to praise' it: the aim is not to explicate the essence of what it is to be 'beyond-being,' but to continuously herald the *thatness* of the beyond-being. Denys continues this line of thought in section 2 of the same chapter: 'Therefore, this discourse intends to praise the divine names of the shining forth of Providence. For (it is not intended) to describe the beyond-beingness for the 'goodness', 'being', 'life' and 'wisdom' of the beyond-beingness of the Divine. It announces the beyond all goodness, the beyond all divinity, the beyond all being, the beyond all life and the beyond all wisdom, hidden, as the Scriptures say, beyond-image (*ὑπεριδρυμένη*); but manifesting the good-making Providence (superabundantly goodness and the cause of all good things), it praises even as 'being', 'life', 'wisdom' that being-making, life-creating, wisdom-giving Cause of all those participating in being, life, mind and perception' (816c).<sup>47</sup> 'To announce the shining forth of the beyond-being as hidden beyond-image,' being recognizes that which it finds to be necessary for its own existence as standing in relation to the beyond-being, and in so doing praises the beyond-being as such: ". . . for every *x*, there is a *y* that characterizes it in such a way that, in stating "I praise you, Lord, as *y*," *x* makes request to it as its Requisite. . . the

<sup>47</sup> cf. Louth, *op cit.*, 93-4. Brief yet insightful discussion of the notion of *pronoia* (providence).

proposition of the language-object "x states *p*, where *p* = I praise you" becomes explicit and correct only if a metalanguage locates in "praise as. . ." the mark of a status of enunciation, which itself announces the relation of request between *x* and the Requisite under a certain relation *y*.<sup>48</sup> Praise 'enunciates' and 'announces' a relation between *praiser* and *Praised* by means of *praising*. What does it mean, then, to praise the beyond-being by means of (rational and empirical) being? What is the relationship between the one who praises and that by means of which praise is offered?

### *3.1. Praise and Rational Being*

'I praise you, Lord, as 'One': 'The name 'One' means that God is uniquely all things through the transcendence of one unity and that he is the cause of all without ever departing from that oneness' (*DN* XIII, 977c).<sup>49</sup> Hence, to praise God as 'One' is to praise him as, e.g., 'Good', 'Being' or 'Life';<sup>50</sup> but 'God is Good of good', 'God is Being of being', 'God is Life of life.'<sup>51</sup> It is to recognize that 'everything, and every part of everything' (977c), stands in a unique relationship with God, that the 'One' is necessary for being and that all that the 'One' requires further predication. 'I praise you, Lord, as 'One' instantly implies 'I praise you, Lord, as 'uniquely all things' and 'I praise you, Lord, as 'cause of all things.' The 'One' is all things by means of being the Cause of all things on account of its self-extension of Goodness to all things. 'They name the thearchic mode of being (*ὑπαρξιν*) 'goodness,' because goodness extends to all beings, on account of being the Good as essential Good' (693b). The self-extending of the Good from the unity beyond-being to the multiplicity of all being, as being, requires that the 'One' as the 'Good' be named with other appropriate predicates.

<sup>48</sup> Marion, *op cit.*, 187-8.

<sup>49</sup> «'Εν δέ, ὅτι πάντα ἐνιαύως ἐστὶ κατὰ μιᾶς ἐνότητος ὑπεροχὴν καὶ πάντων ἐστὶ τοῦ ἐνός ἀνεκφοιτήτως αἶπιον.»

<sup>50</sup> cf. *DN* IV-VII; esp. V 816c-817a.

<sup>51</sup> cf. Proclus, *op cit.*, Prop. 53(52-3). <sup>52</sup> ὥς ἐν εἰκονὶ τὸ ἀρχέτυπον ἐκφαινόμενον

For light comes from the Good, and is an ikon of Goodness. Therefore, the Good is also praised by the name 'Light,' just as by an ikon the archetype is being revealed (*DN IV 697b-697c*).<sup>52</sup>

The image of the self-extension of the beyond-being to all being is captured well in the ikon of 'light.' Thus, the 'sun' analogy: the sun gives its light to all being by means of creating, enlivening, holding together, perfecting, and as such is the measure of being, number, order, part, cause and purpose. The Archetype is so revealed in the ikon.

But also it<sup>53</sup> gives light to all things being enlightened;<sup>54</sup> it creates, enlivens, holds together, perfects, and is the measure of beings and of eternity; it is both number, order, part, cause and purpose (697c).

In 'One', being finds what is necessary for being: meaning and purpose. The statement 'I praise you, Lord, as 'One,' therefore, silently praises God as 'Beauty' as well.

But the beyond-being Beautiful is spoken of as 'Beauty' because of the beauty relationally sharing itself with all things.<sup>55</sup> And as the harmony and splendor of everything, it is the 'Cause,' in the way that a flashing light will share its beauty-making<sup>56</sup> ray with everything from its own source. . . . From this Beauty all things are, according to the relational logic in every beautiful thing;<sup>57</sup> and because of the beauty, harmony, love and communion of all things, and by means of Beauty, all

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<sup>53</sup> θεότητος ἀγαθότης

<sup>54</sup> My rendering for τὰ δυνάμενα πάντα. Instead of taking it as 'to all things having the capacity' or something like this, I want to try to emphasize that being in the position of receiving light from the Divine assumes the element of existence; thus δυνάμενα as 'things being enlightened'.

<sup>55</sup> οἰκείως ἑκάστω

<sup>56</sup> καλλοποιούς

<sup>57</sup> κατὰ τὸν οἰκεῖον λόγον ἑκάστα καλὰ

things are united; and the Beautiful as the poetic cause<sup>58</sup> stimulating and holding together the whole (cosmos), by means of the desire for relational beauty, is the beginning of all things. . . . Therefore, this Beautiful is the Good, so that in everything the Beautiful and the Good is spoken of as the Cause of all things, and there is nothing without its share of the Beautiful and the Good (701c-704b).

"Just as every number participates in unity. . . so everything, and every part of everything, participates in the One" (*DN* 977c): good, light, creativity, life-giving, perfecting, measure, number, order, part, cause, purpose, beauty. So whatever predicates are derivable from the notion of 'One' as, eg., either mathematical singularity, logical truth or metaphysical 'being' are applicable to God in the sense that all things participate in him as their Cause; in this sense, i.e., the sense of participation, "God is uniquely all things," an ikonic identity that does not equate being with the beyond-being. Thus is the way of rational praise.

### *3.2. Praise and Empirical Being*

Language has an empirical nature and purpose as well. Predicates of the empirical sort are more mundane than rational predicates, and being derived from the perceptual are much more various. Denys' reminder to Timothy about his *DN* focuses attention on the rational names for God: 'In the *Divine Names* it was shown the *sense* in which 'good,' 'being,' 'life,' 'wisdom,' 'power,' and whatever other (predicates) are *rational names* for God.'<sup>59</sup> In the *ST*,<sup>60</sup> the concern shifts from the rational to the empirical, of which he says: 'But in the *Symbolic Theology* metonymies (*μετωνυμῖαι*) of God *from what we perceive* (were discussed).'<sup>61</sup> God is spoken of as, for example, having 'eyes', 'ears', 'hair', a 'face', 'hands', 'back', 'wings', 'arms', 'a posterior' and 'feet' (*DN*597a-b).

And in *Ep.* 9 Denys speaks to the issue at some length:

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<sup>58</sup> ποιητικὸν αἶτον

<sup>59</sup> *MT* III 1033a (8-11). Italics (for "sense" *et cetera*) mine. <sup>60</sup> The *Symbolic Theology* is, alas, not an extant work. It is probably a work that has been misplaced, like our author himself, somewhere in the annals of history; for there seems to be no good reason to assume it to be a fictitious work.

I thought it was necessary for him (Timothy) as well as others among us that we purpose to unfold, as far as we were able, the manifold signs<sup>62</sup> concerning the common divine form of God.<sup>63</sup> For apart from this, will it not have been recast as being as unlikely as a ridiculous fabrication even?<sup>64</sup> Regarding the manner of the beyond-being generation of God, God's womb bodily brings forth being formed anew. The Word is described as coming from a human heart like air being breathed out. It describes the Spirit as being breathed out from a mouth. It presents to us in a bodily manner the divine bosom embracing the Son of God. Either being formed anew through these things, both (as) certain trees and suckers, blossoms and foundations, or being exposed as a strong gushing of waters, or as a reflection of a guiding light-source, or by many other (predicates) in the holy writings telling of the beyond-being of the God-logic.<sup>65</sup> But on the mind's perceiving God whether of gifts, appearances, powers, attributes, complaints, abodes, processions, distinctions, or unions in human form, God is also formed anew concerning various forms<sup>66</sup> even of wild animals and other living beings, and of plants, and of stones; he has been presented in women's adornments or in the armor of barbarians, and if as one working with fire, then both as a potter and as a refiner. He is put on horses, chariots and thrones. Some banquets of well-prepared gourmet foods<sup>67</sup> are put on (for him), and he has been represented as drinking, inebriated, sleeping and as someone hung-over.

What might we say about the anger, the grief, the various oaths, the changes of mind, the curses, the ragings and the various and equivocal sophistries of (his) promises: the war of the giants in Genesis, during which it is said that out of fear God was contriving against those strong men, even though the tower was not being designed for injustice to others, but for their own salvation, that council

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But, nonetheless, it is a work wherein Denys dealt with perceptual predication (see Luiheid and Rorem, op cit., notes 72 and 89; and *Ep.* 9 and the final chapter (15) of *CH*).

<sup>61</sup> *MT* III 1033a (11-12). Italics mine. <sup>62</sup> τὰ παντοδαπὰ μορφοματά

<sup>63</sup> τῆς περὶ θεοῦ συμβολικῆς ἱεροπλαστίας

<sup>64</sup> πλάσματῶδους τερατείαις

<sup>65</sup> θεολογιῶν

<sup>66</sup> ποικιλομορφίαν περιπλαττούσης

<sup>67</sup> δαίτας τινὰς οἰσοποικῶς ἐπισκευαζούσης

in heaven for devising to cheat and deceive Ahab, and the very passionate songs of prostitutes and companions?

Skipping just a small portion of the text, he sums all of this up with a very insightful and telling conclusion:

These are to enable one to see, having disciplined oneself, the hidden beauty; mystery will be found, all divine, having been reformed from much theological light. Let us not suppose the appearance of these symbols to be reshaped beyond themselves, but to expose the ineffable and invisible. . . (*Ep. IX, 1104c-1105c*).<sup>68</sup>

The beyond-being spoken through the 'manifold signs' of empirical being. Speaking of God in this manner might well seem to be 'ridiculous fabrication'; for it is nothing less than contradiction, and reason fully resists language use of this sort whether it be about God or round-squares. But being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being makes such language not only possible, but necessary. It is nevertheless irrational to speak of 'finding the hidden beauty' in language that is overtly contrary to beauty of any sort. What is beautiful, e.g., about speaking of God as a 'drunkard', as being 'lazy', 'angry', 'jealous' and 'grieved'; as 'waging war', 'cursing', 'lying' and 'cheating'? Such things are not expected of even the best of *men*. Some sense can be made of speaking of God as a 'breath', 'bosom', 'tree', 'sucker', 'blossom', 'foundation', 'strong gushing of waters', 'light', 'potter', 'refiner', 'guest of honor,' 'water,' 'milk,' 'wine,' 'honey' and as 'riding horses and chariots', 'sitting on thrones' and being an 'animal', 'plant', or 'stone'. All of these predicates speak of God as empirical being. The strength of the former predicates lies in their utter impropriety; these emphasize, in a kind of inverted sense, the beyond-beingness of God.

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<sup>68</sup> ὃν εἴ τις ἰδεῖν δυνηθεῖη τὴν ἐντος ἀποκεκρυμμένην εὐπρέπειαν, εὕρησει μυστικά καὶ θεοειδῆ πάντα καὶ πολλοῦ τοῦ θεολογικοῦ φωτός ἀναπεπλησμένα. Μὴ γὰρ οἴομεθα τὰ φαινόμενα πῶν συνθημάτων ὑπερ ἑαυτῶν ἀναπεπλάσθαι, προβεβλησθαι δὲ τῆς ἀπορρήτου καὶ ἀθεάτου. See also *CH II*.

At 1112b-1112c Denys treats the notion of God's being 'drunk.' A 'drunkard' is taken to be one who is lacking in moderation and stability: one who imbibes *too much* and who, as a result, cannot *think or walk straight*. It implies the notion of being improperly and unhealthily overfull. But as referring to the beyond-being, it implies an excess of moderation and stability, a proper and healthy overfullness. The beyond-being does not drink an overabundance of whiskey or wine, but is an overabundance of goodness and beauty, being and life, knowledge and understanding (etc.). To speak of God as being 'drunk' is not intended to imply that God is a being which has weaknesses and limitations, but that he is outside of being, having no weaknesses and no limitations: it doesn't express lack, but over-abundance. Such is the case with God's being 'lazy', 'angry', 'jealous' and 'grieved,' or as 'waging war,' 'cursing', 'lying' and 'cheating,' which Denys promises to have dealt with in his *ST*.

While overtly kataphatic, these predicates find their semantic value in a fundamental apophatic notion –that God is not a being. Their beauty seems not to be in their truth-value, but in the process of participation and praise: the end of Denys' usage of empirical predicates is not simply to express some truth, but to become one who participates in Truth –not simply to say something beautiful, but to commune with the 'hidden beauty.' Whereas it could be argued that Denys' rational theory of language usage has a decidedly metaphysical feel about it, his empirical theory has a decidedly existential feel. Praise 'enunciates' and 'announces' a relation between *praiser* and *Praised* by means of *praising*: rational praise 'enunciates' and 'announces' a metaphysical relation between being and beyond-being; empirical praise 'enunciates' and 'announces' an existential relation. This seems very much the case when the discourse turns to the beyond-being as empirical being: the Incarnation. "And out of love he has come down to be at our level of nature and has become a being. He, the transcendent God, has



taken on the name of man" (DN II 648d).<sup>69</sup> The beyond-being enters into the womb of a fair Jewish virgin, forms himself therein and, with undiminished glory, comes forth from her as a helpless and pitifully weak little baby. Such is God's foolishness.<sup>70</sup>

#### 4. Hierarchy

What is the role of hierarchy in the processes of participation and praise?<sup>71</sup> 'As I see it,' Denys reasons, 'hierarchy is a holy order (τάξις ἱερὰ), and a science (ἐπιστήμη) and a work (ἐνέργεια) being formed as much as possible to the Divine-form (θεοειδές); and illuminations from God, being given to it proportionately, lead up to the Divine-imitation (θεομίμητον)' (CH III, 1, 164d).<sup>72</sup> Denys speaks explicitly of heavenly and ecclesiastical being in terms of each respective hierarchy, and thus of a general hierarchy of being. Distinguished as three sets of threes, celestial being is: seraphim, cherubim, thrones (CH VII); dominions, powers, authorities, (CH VIII); principalities, archangels, angels (CH IX).<sup>73</sup> And ecclesiastical being is distinguished in a similar manner: baptism (θεογενεσία), Eucharist (σύναξις), oil (τὸ μύρον);<sup>74</sup> hierarchs, priests, deacons

<sup>69</sup> Denys is quoting or paraphrasing Hierotheos, from his *Elements of Theology*, throughout paragraph 10. See also 644a-c.

<sup>70</sup> cf. 1Cor. 1:25 (NRSV); see also Clément, op cit., 37. He draws attention here, as well to the foolishness of God's "kenosis." In dealing with Heidegger's position on 'Being' as a non-theological term, Marion, op cit., 63, presents the following Heideggerian definition: "'Foolishness" here indicates much more than an error, a divergence, a conflict; foolishness indicates the irreducibility of two logics that neither can nor must, in any case, comprehend one another: faith cannot comprehend thought, or thought faith; no third position will ever present itself to reconcile them, to the extent that "in the face of a final decision, the ways part."'" See his notes 20-2, 62-3.

<sup>71</sup> Denys' notion of hierarchy alone has been quite influential, notably with Aquinas' notion of *ordo* (Balthasar, op cit., 166); the term, *ἱεραρχία*, furthermore, seems to be uniquely his own (Marion, op cit., 164, note 45). Concerning this see Gersh, op cit., 125-92.

<sup>72</sup> See also 165 b-c; EH 373c; 500d-504a; Roques *L'Univers dionysien*, 35-131; Marion, op cit., 162-80; Louth *Origins*, 168-172, and *Denys the Areopagite*, 33-77; 84-87; 105-09; Rorem *Commentary*, 57-9; Golitzin, op cit., 119-66; and concerning ἀναλόγως and the Dionysian notion of 'analogy,' cf. Roques, op cit., 53-67; Lossky "La notion des "analogies" chez le Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite"; Andia, op cit., 101-08.

<sup>73</sup> See Roques, op cit., 136-47; and his intro to his *La Hiérarchie Céleste*, xlvii-lvii.

<sup>74</sup> On baptism (θεογενεσία), Eucharist (σύναξις), oil (τὸ μύρον) (cf. EH II, III, IV, respectively); cf. Roques, op cit., 246-78. Roques sees these as the 'work' of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, not as constituting a 'level' thereof (cf. 174-75). Louth differs with Roques on this (cf. op cit., 168). The obvious problem would seem to be that the other three ecclesiastical mysteries

(*λειτουργοί*); monks, baptized, and those who are not organically part of the Church (*EH* II-VI, 392a-537c).<sup>75</sup> Each being is being formed according to its capacity to the Divine-likeness. The formation is achieved in so far as each being within the hierarchy is so formed, and becomes itself a living ikon of the order, science and work of the beyond-being: each being becomes a 'song of praise' to the beyond-being by means of the formation of its being to the likeness of the 'being' of the beyond-being. Hierarchy is, therefore, the proper manifestation of the beyond-being in being, and so is itself the source of this process for being, while being the process as well: hierarchical participation with being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being, and the process of praising the beyond-being-by-means-of-being has as its goal participation with the beyond-being, yet is itself that process of participation. Each being participates, with the beyond-being by means of its proper hierarchy and its proper place within that hierarchy, and thus partakes of and manifests the harmony of the beyond-being as much as is possible.

Denys' view of being in general is hierarchical as well. The extension of this conception to include all being, and every part of being,<sup>76</sup> his notion of being-as-ikon together with his notion of ascent<sup>77</sup> into the beyond-being, is the 'holy order, science and work' of the empirical and rational (in terms of 'knowledge') and the kataphatic, apophatic and silent (in terms of language usage – 'praise'). To know is to participate hierarchically with the beyond-being by means of being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being. To praise is to speak hierarchically the beyond-being by means of the being of language-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being. The beyond-

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(cf. *DN* V, VI, VII) of 'ordinations,' 'initiations,' and 'burials' are not treated in like fashion. The mystery of oil is a curiosity lending credence to Denys' Syrian roots: see Louth *Denys*, 53 and 63.

<sup>75</sup> cf. Roques, op cit., 176-99.

<sup>76</sup> cf. *DN*, 825a-b; 952a

<sup>77</sup> cf. Marion, op cit., 165f on 'ascent' and 'emanation.' "Not that the two movements succeed one another or compensate for one another, but they overlap one another, or even are identical to one another. . . each member receives the gift only in order to give it, such that this gift, in the same gesture, regives the gift in redundancy ("emanation") and, giving, sends the original gift back to its foundation (ascent). . ." (cf. *CH* 165a; 168a; *EH* 372c).

being gives itself to being, and being gives itself to the beyond-being.<sup>78</sup> This interdependent process is what Denys speaks of as procession and return;<sup>79</sup> the action of the process is what Denys speaks of as beauty. Hierarchy is, therefore, the action of the beyond-being giving itself to being, and of being giving itself to the beyond-being: it is the movement of beautiful-being-as-ikon proceeding (*προόδος*) from the beauty-of-the-beyond-being as source and returning (*ἐπιστροφή*) to the beauty-of-the-beyond-being as goal.

The beyond-being makes itself known as the Unknowable which is the source-cause of all being, and being according to its proper capacity (in hierarchy) is both the making known and the coming to know the Unknowable beyond-being. "If, on the one hand, any manifestation makes itself known as the manifestation of the One-and-Only not merely contingently (as is often the case with members of a class) but rather of necessity, then indeed this One is truly visible, everywhere announced, in the all which is his manifestation, but only as the eternally One and therefore eternally mysterious, hidden One who can never be fully comprehended in any of his manifestations; and therefore the wondering admiration of his beauty –as manifestation, as relation between manifestation and non-manifestation- is grounded in the worship of what is not manifest."<sup>80</sup> Rather than eschewing being, Denys takes it to be essential; there is no place for an over-spiritualized mysticism in Denys' thought which undervalues the role that being plays in its own desire to be in a right relationship with the beyond-being; spatio-temporal being is not illusion which needs to be overcome, for Denys, but an ever-active self-manifestation on the part of the beyond-being, a self-manifestation which calls all that it manifests (all being) to become what it has been manifested to be: a manifestation of the beyond-being, i.e. being-as-ikon.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 'receiving the gift in order to give it': the gift is the giving through being given back to the beyond-being.

<sup>79</sup> cf. *DN* 916c-d; *CH* 260b; *EH* 392b; 393a; *Ep.* IX, 1105a ('*ἐπιστροφή*' is not used in this epistle); neither terms are used in *MT*, nor is the term *ἐραρχία*.

<sup>80</sup> Balthasar, *op cit.*, 165.

Being's failure to become a manifestation, to see all of being as manifestation is, therefore, an essentially spiritual misappropriation of the gift of being.<sup>81</sup> "Everything lies in the circular movement between procession and return, the cataphatic and the apophatic, nothing can find fulfillment except by entering this movement."<sup>82</sup> Yet while the process of procession and return allows for being to actualize a relationship of manifestation, it remains impossible for being to become that which it manifests.<sup>83</sup> hierarchy does not establish a 'corporate ladder' upon which being can ascend into something other than being,<sup>84</sup> but establishes the proper relational dynamic for being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being to properly commune with the beyond-being.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, "[t]he same knowledge of God demands both a deeper penetration *into* the image and also a more sublime transcendence *beyond* it, and the two are not separated one from another but are the more fully integrated, the more perfectly they are achieved. For if it is true that God goes out of himself 'ecstatically' –because all things really are, and would not be if God were not in them all in all- then it is also equally true, and even more true, that he need not go outside of himself to know the world, for he knows it in himself in an archetypal fashion, which is the same as to say again that God does not simply –as creative *causa efficiens*- set a 'second thing' alongside himself, but that the mystery of creation because of its intimacy cannot dispense with the category of participation; that God, like the sun, imparts being through his being and is present to every being, so that now no being or form can be –or may be- excluded from those which can help us to find him."<sup>86</sup> In so far as hierarchy and participation are defining elements of Denys' position –defining in terms of being, knowledge, language- then it seems therefore that if the form of truth is necessarily hierarchical and therefore participatory -i.e., it is not fundamentally

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<sup>81</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>83</sup> *EH* VIII, 896b.

<sup>84</sup> cf. Louth, *Denys*, 105-09, and *Origins*, 171-72.

<sup>85</sup> cf. Andia, op cit.; Golitzin, op cit., 77-118.

<sup>86</sup> Balthasar, op cit., 169-70. Cf. *DN* IX, 912d-916a.

*essential* but *existential*- and as such it is infinite, as is for example the relation between numerals (ikon) and numbers (ikoned), then *truth is process*; not process in general, but the process of becoming holy. Such a notion of truth must form the unwritten preface to *Ep. VI*.

Sosipater seems to have found truth to be emboldening, something which he can use to refute an opposing position, something which he has learned and therefore now possess within himself; but Denys suggests that truth is the sort of thing that should humble, not embolden; that it should define one's entire being, not simply one's thought and speech; that it reveals, but does not refute. Denys' hierarchical notion of truth seems to have the tell-tale signs, therefore, of being a verb, rather than a noun: it is a doing, an ethic, not a thing, that unites being and the beyond-being. Moses has his Siniatic vision on account of his humility, by means of his participation with truth (cf. *Ep VIII*, 1048bff), so too of David's being spoken of as 'a man after my own heart,' of Job's ultimate justification, Joseph's lack of vengeance toward his brothers, Abel's trust in Cain (cf. 1085b). Such too is the manner in which Christ himself deals with all mankind: he does not reject those who have rejected him; he is not vengeful toward those who accuse him. Christ, the beyond-being-in-being, lives amongst being as Truth because he is the archetype of proper participation with the preeminent hierarchy, the most holy Trinity (thearchy).<sup>87</sup> This process of becoming holy<sup>88</sup>, as I dubbed it above, is realized more fully as one approaches more closely the Light of the beyond-being: for the beings who are closest to this Light "are more capable of receiving light and of passing it on" (1092b). The capacity for 'nearness' on the part of being has nothing to do with spatial location but with the hierarchical position of each (type of) being: an archangel manifests the true light of the beyond-being more effectively than does a holy monk.<sup>89</sup> But it is not a matter of

<sup>87</sup> cf. *DN III*, 680b; *Ep VIII*, 1085c-1088a; *EH* 428c.

<sup>88</sup> cf. Marion, op cit., 164-180.

<sup>89</sup> cf. *EH I*, 373b; *II*, 400d; 404c; *IV*, 477d; *VII*, 568d; and *CH I*, 164d. See also Andia, op cit., 101-3; Lossky, op cit.

order only; one must function according to the 'science and work' of one's place within the hierarchical order (cf. 1092B and 1093A), and in so doing become true being.<sup>90</sup>

##### *5. Beauty and Being*

What is 'beauty' or the 'beautiful' for Denys? A response to this question will require a bit of synthesis and supposition; for he never actually defines these terms, apart from affirming that there is an identity between the Beautiful and the Good. They remain necessary, but undefined throughout the *CD*. His treatment in *DN IV* of 'beauty' and 'beautiful' is the lengthiest (by which he clarifies what is called 'beauty' and 'beautiful' 701c-704c), rivaled in importance by the conceptual value of his sculptor analogy that appears in *MT II*; the role of beauty is referenced in the *EH* in particular in terms of looking into the beauty of an ecclesiastical mystery,<sup>91</sup> and in *CH I*, he speaks of beauty as having an ikonik function, at least in terms of the hierarchical orders of the Church reflecting those of heaven.<sup>92</sup> By means of these passages Denys' conception of beauty is slightly unveiled but in no way terminologically defined.

The beautiful participates by means of calling back to the calling, which is beauty itself (701c): 'we say the beautiful is the partaking in Beauty, but beauty is the partaking of the Beautiful Cause of All Things Beautiful: the beauty beyond-being is said to be beautiful because of its participation with all beings. . . calling all things to itself.' That which is discerned by the theologian is this synaxis of beauty and that which is beautiful: this synaxis is Source and End of being in which being participates by virtue of being; it ikonifies this Source-End participation, calling being to itself and is hidden in the beauty of beautiful-being-as-ikon.<sup>93</sup> It might be said that this dynamic beauty-beautiful process of

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<sup>90</sup> *EH II*, 397D-400a; 896b.

<sup>91</sup> eg., *III*, 428c; *IV*, 476b

<sup>92</sup> cf. 121d.

<sup>93</sup> cf. Plato *Cratylus*, 416a-d.

participation is for Denys the beyond-being in being and being in the beyond-being: the unmanifest manifested, the unknown known, the ineffable spoken.

Heisenberg's experience with a text written by Leopold Kronecker would seem to be instructive here (I return to this example in chapter Five).<sup>94</sup> Having read a Latin treatise in which Kronecker treats 'the relation of the properties of whole numbers to the geometrical problem of dividing a circle into a number of parts,' Heisenberg was deeply impressed by a sense of beauty.

I sensed a quite immediate beauty in the fact that, from the problem of partitioning a circle, whose simplest cases were, of course, familiar to us in school, it was possible to learn something about the totally different sort of questions involved in elementary number theory... The impression of something beautiful was, however, perfectly direct; it required no justification or explanation... But what was beautiful here? Even in antiquity there were two definitions of beauty which stood in certain opposition to one another... The one describes beauty as the proper conformity of parts to one another, and to the whole. The other, stemming from Plotinus, describes it, without any reference to parts, as the translucence of the eternal splendor of the "one" through the material phenomenon.<sup>95</sup>

By his own reckoning Heisenberg's was an experience of beauty regarding the relation of parts to one another and to the whole.

Denys' position suggests a similar experience, yet not with this or that text, but with the 'text' of being. Being as manifestation-of-beyond-being experiences its own relation to other beings and to the whole of being, but also comes to experience being as the radiance of the beyond-being in and through the whole of being. Knowing and being are responsive processes which respond to the self-manifestation of the beyond-being in and through being: beauty is not simply an

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<sup>94</sup> See chapter three.

aesthetic quality of a certain thing, it is the aesthetic process of being relating to the beyond-being and of the beyond-being relating to being, an ever-active process of

reciprocal participation, exemplified by the hierarchical process of truth and holiness. Hierarchy is to Denys what whole numbers and the geometry of the circle are to Heisenberg in the sense of parts relating to parts and to the whole; but it itself is the process of the whole manifesting the immanence of the beyond-being. The key element of Denys' thought would seem to be this notion of the beauty-beautiful process of participation, as indeed the notion of beauty in Heisenberg's sense is fundamental to modern science. Holiness is the existential aspect of this process of participation, of which Heisenberg's was an experience of number as the mathematical aspect.

But this paradigm becomes problematic quite quickly if it is assumed that the parts (being) fit together to become the whole (beyond-being): though being is manifestation of the beyond-being, the essential nature of the beyond-being is not manifested into being.<sup>96</sup> *Theosis* is not the process of being's becoming the beyond-being, but of being participating in the beyond-being as its Source and Purpose by means of a love-response to the creative love of the beyond-being: it is the process of being's being manifestation of the beauty of the beyond-being as ikon and of becoming a partaker of the beauty of the beyond-being.<sup>97</sup> Denys' position includes a Heisenbergian-type of conception of beauty, but it is a much more all-encompassing notion, by means of underscoring the beauty of the reality of being as ikon, of which Heisenberg's is a foretaste: chapter Five on this score can be viewed as a microcosm of Denys' macrocosm.

Denys' notion of beauty is interested not simply in discerning beauty whether empirical or otherwise, but in being and becoming beauty and beautiful:

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<sup>95</sup> "Science and the Beautiful", in Ken Wilber, ed., *Quantum Questions* (Boston: Shambala Press), 57-8.

<sup>96</sup> cf. *DN* II, 645c-d; 11, 649a-649b; 4, 817c-825c.



the theologian for Denys is not an observer like the scientist who discerns the relation of the manifold nature of whole numbers to the unified nature of a system of axioms; instead, he sees all of being as standing in such a relation to the beyond-being by means of a response to the beauty of the beyond-being in all being. This is not simply a matter of the elegance of numerical relations; the concern of theological beauty is the elegance of being-as-ikon itself.

Heisenberg, in reflecting on his experience, concludes that: "*without any reflection, we feel* the completeness and simplicity of this axiom system to be beautiful." His was an experience powerful enough for him to speak conclusively about the nature of mathematics itself; it was not an experience that was interesting but fleeting and ultimately unimportant. Years later he wrote these words reflecting on an experience from his boyhood. Something so basic and fundamental as the completeness of the axiom system of mathematics needed only to be 'felt' by a child.

An enigma that surfaces here is that such an experience as Heisenberg describes and comments on leads ultimately to knowledge claims: emotive-based feeling seems to be basic for the way that knowledge works in such a position. On feeling the relation between whole numbers and the axiom system, Heisenberg makes claims about the system itself: the sense of participation between number and axiom seems itself to have been utterly convincing. This seems a good analog for Denys' take on knowledge as *of* being and *in* being.

Denys does speak of 'experiences' that certain people have had which would press the similarity a bit more thoroughly, but these are not crucial for the point at hand.<sup>98</sup> His notion of knowledge as being *of* being and *in* being centers on the notion of participation: being in communion with the beyond-being, the harmony of being and beyond-being. Thus, the splendor of the beauty of the beyond-being is the beckoning voice to being, calling it toward an experience of

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<sup>97</sup> cf. *DN VIII*, 892b-893a. In *CH* 208d, the 'theosis' is spoken of as 'a fully fulfilled science of the theurgies' (cf. *EH* 372b); *EH I*, 372c-373b; 376a-377b; 393a; 429c-432a; 7, 433b-d; 5, 536b-c.

itself in and through all being, a voice to which Heisenberg would have necessarily (albeit unknowingly) hearkened, and ultimately to an experience of itself beyond-being. Crucial in this is being's sense of being's connection with the beyond-being, an existential conviction, part beckoning and part response: the sense itself of participation between being and beyond-being seems to be utterly convincing.

In both cases, that which is believed most firmly, that which issues in knowledge claims, is organically part of a relational context, mathematical on the one hand, existential on the other, and it is this context of sensing beauty-beautiful which allows for knowledge, scientific on the one hand, theological on the other, devoid of proof.

Such an analogy would for Denys be an ikon of the greater truth of *synaxis* (Holy Eucharist): the ecclesiastical mystery of the 'drawing together' of all being into the beyond-being.<sup>99</sup> Science aims to discern empirical phenomena in terms of 'laws' of nature, a part to whole approach to understanding the natural world: theology aims to discern the beyond-being in terms of being, a part to whole, many-in-one approach to understanding the activities of the beyond-being. But neither science nor theology achieve their respective goals by means of this approach alone; being led by beauty both of them reckon with the presence of the Beautiful. The scientist asks 'What is beautiful in terms of natural phenomena?' and seeks to 'draw together' the truth of the natural world by means of discerning the laws of nature. The theologian asks 'What is Beautiful?' and seeks to 'draw together' all of being by means of discerning its presence in being (properly the theurgic work of the hierarchies). Denys' approach, it would seem, could well conceive of the former as a hierarchical level of theology; this is a suggestion however that is very far afield from anything that he himself ever actually addresses.

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<sup>98</sup> cf. *Ep.* VIII, 197bff; *DN* II, 648a-b; III, 681c-684a; *MT* I, 1000 c-d; Louth *Denys*, 99-109.

<sup>99</sup> cf. *EH* III.

His notion of relational beauty, the dynamic beauty-beautiful process of participation, is still, however, more encompassing: that which is dissimilar too has a place in the part-whole relation, and it too is an image of the beyond-being. It can be assumed that a Heisenbergian experience of beauty could not have resulted from an experience devoid of particulars and unifying principles that were not similar to one another. Not only are those closest hierarchically to the beyond-being beautiful beings, but those who are hierarchically even at the farthest remove from him are as well:<sup>100</sup> all being participates in this process of relational beauty. The hierarchical structure of being while leading ultimately to unknowing communion with the beyond-being is necessarily a graded structure in which those beings that are closer to the Source and End of the hierarchy bear a stronger resemblance to it, whereas those that are farther away are less similar: the degree to which being participates with beyond-being determines the degree to which being is either more similar to the beyond-being or less so. Nevertheless, given the ikonicon nature of being, whether more or less similar to that which it ikonifies, there follows no distinction or separation between being as similar to beyond-being and being as dissimilar to beyond-being in which the former participates in the process of relational beauty whereas the latter does not: that which is similar as well as that which is dissimilar by virtue of being participates to some degree in the process of relational beauty, so that even that which is most unlike the beyond-being is a part of the whole and manifests the beauty-beyond-being in so far as it is able. This notion of dissimilar-similarity is not one that is to be found overtly in positions such as Heisenberg's. Even if this is granted, Denys' position remains uniquely distinct in that it overtly treats this notion as a part of being that cannot be ignored; it does not arise by accident, but is established from the beginning. The process of relational beauty for Denys does not simply achieve a state of knowledge, but by means of the dissimilar-similarity of being is called to praise that in which being is united, that which is manifested in and through

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<sup>100</sup> cf. *DN IX*, 913c-916a; *CH* 140d-141c.

being.<sup>101</sup> Praise, as has been noted, has an empirical dimension as well as a rational one, and is hierarchically ordered: the spoken word of the process of relational beauty is, therefore, the hierarchy –from nature to nous- of praise.

An experience of the Heisenbergian sort, Einstein's GTR conviction for example,<sup>102</sup> might well result in scientific advance by way of proof that substantiates an experience of beauty. But the theologian however is called not simply to demonstrate beauty by proof but to become as a being a more distinct dissimilar-similar ikon of it: his is the work not of proof but of being praise (both in the adjectival as well as the verbal sense of the term).<sup>103</sup>

#### *6. Excursus: Participation by Proof as Praise*

As the forgoing discussion might well imply, Denys is usually taken as a mystical theologian, and is, thus, interpreted and applied as such. It is commonly assumed that proof, therefore, has no place in his position. But does this follow?

Denys seems at times to be opposed to it. For example, 'But we should remember that the focus of the discourse is not to show the beyond-being being as the beyond-being, for this is shameful and unlearned and completely not 'making-known' -union transcends; but (the focus of our discourse is) to praise the being-making procession of the thearchic being-source to all beings' (*DN*, 5, 1, 816b). Here he seems to be opposed to assuming that the *whatness* of the beyond-being can be treated in any sort of a conclusive manner. But the implication of his thought seems to be that proof would indeed have a role provided it itself was 'being formed as much as possible to the Divine-likeness.' It would seem, therefore, that in so far as discourse is centered upon the procession of the differentiated activities of the beyond-being, then proof would have a place in Denys' position. Denys' work, however, is void of proofs; his treatment of the

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<sup>101</sup> The image that Denys' position seems to conjure might well reflect his Neo-Platonic, rather than his first century roots. His is a position which seems tacitly to play with a musical paradigm so that the theological art of being and becoming part of the process of relational beauty seems very much like music-making: Denys' theological concern is being's harmonizing with the beyond-being.

<sup>102</sup> see chapter Five.

problem of evil alone comes closest (*DN*, IV, 716aff.).<sup>104</sup> It can only be hoped here, however, to formulate a few thoughts that would agree with Denys' theory of knowledge by looking at the nature of proof itself within some other contexts. Proof it seems is important within such a system not because of its deductive sufficiency, but because of its ikonic value. Though Denys himself might not have found any significant role for proof in his writings, his position, in my opinion, seems amenable, nevertheless, to demonstration. In *Ep.* IX, as was noted above, he explicitly refers to two types of theology: the symbolic and the demonstrative (1105c). Denys, it seems, at least clearly recognizes the need for proof. Here we shall look at two proofs, a rational (or *a priori*) one and an empirical (or *a posteriori*) one, namely Anselm's ontological argument and Paley's teleological argument, suggesting that if these 'proofs' are interpreted as examples of praise, in Denys' sense, then there would seem to be no incompatibility between his position and the usage of proof.

We turn first to Anselm's ontological argument:

(First *reductio*)

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And *whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a*

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<sup>103</sup> On 'participation' in Marcel: cf. Joe McCown *Availability: Gabriel Marcel and the Phenomenology of Human Openness* (Scholars Press: 1978), 45.

<sup>104</sup> Anselm's 'argument' is two arguments, the first deriving from chapter two of the *Proslogium*, the second from chapter three. Cf. Proclus, *op cit.*, Prop. 13(15). Cf. *DN* XIII 977b-977c. "He is perfect, not only because he is *absolute perfection*, both defining perfection in himself and because of his singular existence and total perfection, but also because he is far beyond being so" *Italics mine.*

*greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.*

(Second *reductio*)

*And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.*

Standardizing these arguments results in: (first *reductio*) (i) 'God' is conceivable. (ii) 'God' is coherent. (iii) 'God' does *not* exist in the mind alone. (iv) Assume that 'God' exists in the mind alone. (v) If 'God' exists in the mind alone, then there is a greater mode of existence than that which is realized by 'God'. (vi) Thus, 'God' is not *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*. (vii) This premise (vi) is contradictory. (viii) Therefore, 'God' exists *both in the mind and in reality*; and (second *reductio*) (i) 'God' does *not* exist contingently. (ii) Assume that 'God' *does* exist contingently. (iii) If 'God' *does* exist contingently, then there is an Other upon whom 'God' depends for his existence. (iv) Thus, 'God' is not *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*. (v) This premise (iv) is contradictory. (vi) Therefore, God exists *necessarily*.<sup>105</sup> St Anselm deductively shows that 'God' exists both in the mind (the term is coherent) and in reality (has a legitimate ontological status, i.e., he is something external to any mental reality), and also that he exists *necessarily* (i.e. he is not dependent on anything for his

<sup>105</sup> St. Anselm *Proslogium* in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. Sidney N. Deane (Open Court, 1903), chs. 2-3, 145-47. In symbolic notation: first *reductio*: (i) U (ii) C (iii)  $\supseteq A$  (iv) A (assmp.) (v) R (i.e.

initial and/or continual existence). The argument(s) makes no sense if the term 'God' remains unclear. His definition of 'God' (as a term) is *that than which nothing greater can be conceived*, which could be restated as follows: *God is AP (absolutely perfect) with regard to both his mode of hyparxis and his attributes*, i.e. he exists in the greatest conceivable modal state and enjoys the highest conceivable perfection of all his abilities. If the term 'God' is defined in this way, then the conclusion that 'God' is a mental construct cannot follow; neither could it be that he is a contingent being.<sup>106</sup> This line of reasoning can be used to show as well that if God is an *APB* ('absolutely perfect being'), then he is so uniquely, i.e., he is the only one in the 'class' of *APB*'s. This can be done as follows. An *APB* would be *AP* in its existence, knowledge, goodness, power and productivity. Assume that there exist two *APB*'s: *APB*<sub>1</sub> and *APB*<sub>2</sub>. On the basis of this assumption, then, it will be required by reason to affirm that the following identity statement holds true for these two *APB*'s: *APB*<sub>1</sub> = *APB*<sub>2</sub>. The reason for this is simply that these two distinct and separate beings, if they are identical, cannot be distinct and separate from one another at all: they are *identical*. This type of argument could be made with any number of *APB*'s; for no matter how many we

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$\supseteq A) \square$  (vi)  $A \theta \supseteq A$  (vii)  $I \square$  (vii)  $A \exists R$ . *second reductio*: (i)  $\supseteq T$  (ii)  $T$  (assmp.) (iii)  $N$  (i.e.  $\supseteq T) \square$  (iv)  $T \theta \supseteq T$  (v)  $I \square$  (vi)  $N$ . The italicized portions of the above text are mine.

<sup>106</sup> For criticisms to this argument, see, for example Norman Malcolm's "Anselm's Ontological Arguments" in Hick and McGill's *The Many Faced Argument*. Here, Malcolm calls into question the assumption which goes back at least to Descartes that 'existence' is a perfection, in contention with premise (v) of the first argument. His reflections are quite interesting, for example "The doctrine that existence is a perfection is remarkably queer. . . A king might desire that his next chancellor should have knowledge, wit and resolution; but it is ludicrous to add that the king's desire is to have a chancellor that exists. Suppose that two royal counselors, A and B, were asked to draw up separately descriptions of the most perfect chancellor they could conceive, and that the descriptions they produced were identical except that A included existence in his list of attributes of a perfect chancellor and B did not. One and the same person could satisfy both descriptions. More to the point, any person who satisfied A's description would *necessarily* satisfy B's description, and vice versa!" This point seems to hold going from A's description to B's. But moving in the opposite direction, what if B no longer exists, that is what if he is dead? See also C. Hartshorne's "What Did Anselm Discover" in the same volume. Alvin Plantinga's well known treatment of this argument also demands mention: "The Ontological Argument", *The Analytic Theist*, ed. James F. Sennett (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids: 1998). And lastly, Immanuel Kant's objection is to be found in his *Critique of Pure Reason* Pt.2.2, bk.2.3.4. See also my chapter Four.

posit, it turns out to be the case that reason requires an ontological equality. Thus, there can exist exactly *one APB*.

Whether or not this argument is successful as a deductive proof, however, does not concern the value of the argument, according to Dionysian thought, insofar as it praises 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived.'

What of praise by empirical induction? Paley's teleological argument and Hume's criticisms may serve well. Paley's argument proceeds as follows:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there, I might possibly answer, that, for anything I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever: nor would it perhaps be very easy to shew the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be enquired how the watch happened to be in that place, I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there. Yet why should not this answer serve for the watch as well as for the stone? Why is it not as admissible in the second case, as in the first? For this reason, and for no other, viz. that, when we come to inspect the watch, we perceive (what we could not discover in the stone) that its several parts are framed and put together for a purpose, e.g. that they are so formed and adjusted as to produce motion, and that motion so regulated as to point out the hour of the day; that, if the several parts had been differently shaped from what they are, of a different size from what they are, or placed after in any other manner, or in any other order, than that in which they are placed, either no motion at all would have been carried on in the machine, or none which would have answered the use that is now served by it. . . [E]very indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the works of nature; with the difference, on the side of nature, of being greater and more, and that in a degree which exceeds all computation. I mean that the contrivances of nature surpass the contrivances of art, in the complexity, subtilty [*sic.*], and curiosity of the mechanism; and still more, if possible, do they go beyond them in number and variety: yet, in a multitude of cases, are not less



evidently mechanical, not less evidently contrivances, not less evidently accommodated to their end, or suited to their office, than are the most perfect productions of human ingenuity.<sup>107</sup>

For the argument to work in terms of providing grounds for believing that there is a Cosmic Designer, the analogy must establish links both between each teleological system as well as between each teleological system's designer. The argument is quite simple, consisting of three premises only and a main conclusion: (i) The cosmos is similar to a watch. (ii) Both exhibit signs of having been designed. (iii) The watch has been designed. (iv) Thus, it is probable that the cosmos has been designed. This argument is of interest because it is an analogy which speaks of the Cause through the caused. The analogy is stimulated by the purposeful means-end adaptation that, on the one hand, the watch exhibits in telling time, and that, on the other hand, the cosmos exhibits, in a limited sense, in such instances as the seeing of the eye, and more broadly in its means-end adaptation as a whole. There are, obviously, two essential parts, or analogs, to this analogy: the watch-cosmos and the watchmaker-cosmosmaker. A crucial point of critical attack concerns the watchmaker and cosmosmaker. This part of the analogy expresses analogical similarities and dissimilarities between the human being and the beyond being. In his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume has 'Philo' as the theistic critic against 'Cleanthes' the classical theist. Philo sees that if such an argument is to have any strength at all, then the analogical relationship between the attributes and existence of watch-designers and the attributes and existence of a cosmos-designer (conceived of in the classical theistic sense) must be a similar one.<sup>108</sup> If such a relationship can be well

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<sup>107</sup> William Paley *Natural Theology* (Ibis: 1986), ch. 1-3.

<sup>108</sup> It will be remembered that Philo is actually responding to Cleanthes' teleological argument which is of a slightly different ilk. A standardization of that argument would be as follows: (i) Machines are created by means of intelligent design. (ii) The cosmos is machine-like. □ (iii) The cosmos was probably produced by intelligent design. The primary difference in the two arguments resides in the fact that Paley employs a *watch*, whereas Cleanthes employs the notion of *machines*.

established on inductive grounds, then the argument is successful (inductively speaking, i.e., it does not *prove* the existence of a cosmos-maker, but provides some probability, though it might not be a high degree thereof, for such a *belief*). The following text centers criticism around the principle 'like effects prove like causes.'

But to show you still more inconveniences, continued Philo, in your Anthropomorphisms, please to take a new survey of your principles. *Like effects prove like causes*. This is the experimental argument; and this, you say too, is the sole theological argument. Now it is certain, that the liker the effects are which are seen, and the liker the causes which are inferred, the stronger the argument. Every departure on either side diminishes the probability, and renders the experiment less conclusive. You cannot doubt of the principle; neither ought you reject its consequences. . . Now, Cleanthes, said Philo, with an air of alacrity and triumph, mark the consequences. *First*, by this method of reasoning, you renounce all claim to infinity in any of the attributes of the Deity. For, as the cause ought only to be proportioned to the effect, and the effect, so far as it falls under cognizance, is not infinite; what pretensions have we, upon your suppositions that attribute to the divine? . . . *Secondly*, you have no reason, on your theory, for ascribing perfection to the Deity, even in his capacity, or for supposing him free from every error, mistake, or incoherence, in his undertakings. . . At least, you must acknowledge, that it is impossible for us to tell, from our limited views, whether this system contains any great faults, or deserves any considerable praise, if compared to other possible, and even real systems. . . And what shadows of an argument can you produce, from your hypothesis, to prove the unity of the Deity? A great number of men join in building a house or ship, in rearing a city, in framing a commonwealth; why may not several deities combine in contriving and framing a world? . . . But farther, Cleanthes: Men are mortal, and renew their species by generation; and this is common to all living creatures. The two great

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The mechanical component remains the same, one emphasizing the point initially at a specific level, the other at a general level.

sexes of male and female, says Milton, animate the world. Why must this circumstance, so universal, so essential, be excluded from those numerous and limited deities? Behold, then, the theogeny of ancient times brought back upon us. . . And why not become a perfect Anthropomorphite? Why not assert the deity or deities to be corporeal, and to have eyes, a nose, mouth, ears, &c?<sup>109</sup>

First of all, a watch is made (usually) by many watch-makers, each presumably specializing in a certain aspect or aspects of the design process. Furthermore, watch-makers are contingent entities, i.e. a watch-maker begins to exist at one point or another, and at some later time will cease to exist. By implication from these two points, a watch-maker(s) is relatively perfect at least in terms of knowledge and existence, and it is safe to assume the same in an ethical sense as well. Watch-makers also are dependent upon a certain set of materials for their creative activities; a watch-maker creates from stuff, but he/she does not also create the stuff. It is also the case that watch-makers are corporeal, and are, therefore, subject to all kinds of corporeal needs and weaknesses, not the least of which would be his/her limitation in terms of spatial location. These are at least some of the more important dissimilarities or disanalogies that for Hume create huge problems with this type of analogy. For God is not a multiplicity but a Unity, not contingent, but necessary, not relatively, but absolutely perfect; furthermore, God does not create *ex hulas*, as it were, but *ex nihilo*, and is neither corporeal nor merely knowledgeable and skillful, but incorporeal, omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. A Humean style counter-argument, then, working from a classical notion of God, proceeds to show that a cosmos-designer is not at all analogous with a common notion of a watch-designer.

Though he would accept Hume's ultimate point that the analogs cosmosmaker and watchmaker are not as similar as the argument might at face

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<sup>109</sup> cf. David Hume *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Hackett: 1980). My treatment of his criticisms closely resembles his presentation, but I insert *creatio ex hulas* where Hume's intent is to

value imply, Denys' position suggests that these differences do not provide evidence against analogical predication. The linguistic incapacity of language to accurately analogize would only serve to emphasize the limits of language. For what these disanalogies show is not that the classical notion is erroneous (which is not what Hume has shown either, nor even, necessarily, what Denys would ultimately want to affirm), but that it is incomplete. The analogy is not weak, according to Dionysian thought; it is ikonik. Pragmatics takes precedence for Denys: the fact that such an analogy might not accurately map the beyond-being only shows that the beyond-being cannot be so mapped, not that there is no beyond-being. Analogy, therefore, seems to be used to show in an inverted sense that which cannot be analogized directly. Its semantic value is somehow hidden in its pragmatic value.

Insofar as being is ikonik, then proof would seem to be quite comfortably received by Denys' position, and in both of these arguments this is the case. From a Dionysian perspective, rational being ikonifies the nature of the beyond-being, for Anselm, and empirical being does so for Paley. Each argument speaks the beyond-being by means of praising that which is hidden (the beyond-being) within that which is known (being). Thus, although Denys himself may not address the issue of proof, his position, nevertheless, seems to be amenable to it.

### *7. Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have argued, fundamentally, three things. First of all, I have argued that knowledge, for Denys, is participation in the process of relational beauty. Secondly, I have argued that language usage is praise. Both of these points are hierarchically conceived, for Denys, the basic structure of which, as opposed to the specific structures of the ecclesiastical and celestial hierarchies, is his distinction between the rational and the empirical. Furthermore, I have argued that 'proof' is not incompatible with Denys' position if it is interpreted in

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point out the problem in terms of *creatio ex Deo*. Since our discussion centers around a 'watch,' however, the *creatio ex hulas* point seems more appropriate.

*Knowledge, Being and Ikon: Kataphasis in Denys' Epistemology*

terms of his notions of 'ikon' and 'praise'. Let us turn now to Denys' notions of 'unknowing' and 'apophasis'.

*Unknowing, Being and Ikon: Apophasis in Denys' Epistemology*

1. *Unknowing*

But it is necessary to inquire into this: how do we know (*γνώσκομεν*) God [who is] neither a rational thing nor an empirical thing, nor some being of the general [class] of beings? Thus it is perhaps true to say that we know God not from his nature, for he is unknown and above all logic and mind, but from the order of all being, as certain ikons and likenesses of his divine paradigms having been presented by him, moving into the beyond all things by means of a method and order, according to ability: ascending by means of the denial and transcendence of all things, and by means of the Cause of all things. God is perceived as both in all things, and apart from all things: God is perceived both by means of knowing and unknowing. And of him there is reason, logic, science, empirical awareness, perception, opinion, display, name and other things; yet he is neither discerned nor spoken nor named. He is not a certain being; neither is he known in a certain being. He is 'all in all' and nothing in nothing: from all things he is known to all things and from nothing he is known to no one. For we speak about God truly praising him from all being according to the analogy of being for he is the Cause of being. And again the most divine knowledge (*γνώσις*) of God is perceived by means of unknowing according to a union beyond mind when the mind is withdrawn from all being, and having been set free itself, is then united with the brightness beyond light, being enlightened then and there by the unsearchable abundance of wisdom (*DN VII, 3, 869c-872b*).<sup>1</sup>

The *φύσις* ('nature') of the beyond-being is not spoken of in the same sense as the nature of humans, or animals, i.e. it is not spoken of as a being. The question is then 'how do we know something that is unknowable?' The nature of the beyond-being is something that is other than being and cannot be known as being is known. The beyond-being is perceived, according to Denys, by means of rational and empirical ikons, by means of their denial, and by means of its leading the knower up beyond knowing to itself as that which being requires. By means of the analogy of being the beyond-being is known by being; by means of knowing the beyond-being, being knows that the beyond-being cannot be known; by means of

knowing that the beyond-being cannot be known, the knower opens himself humbly to the nature of the beyond-being, and to unknowing.

What is this 'unknowing'? 'For unknowing (*ἀγνοσία*) of the beyond beingness (*ὑπερουσιότητος*)', Denys maintains, 'is beyond logic, mind and being; by it one necessarily refers to a science beyond-being' (*DN* 588a).<sup>2</sup> 'Unknowing': science beyond-being. Denys' *MT* is devoted to this topic entirely, and, interestingly, is his only treatise commencing with prayer:<sup>3</sup>

Trinity beyond being, beyond god, beyond goodness; guide of Christians in divine wisdom. Lead us up beyond unknowing, beyond light to the most extreme summit of the mysteries of scripture<sup>4</sup>: there the mysteries of theology are simple, undivided and unchangeable according to the splendid darkness having been veiled by the hidden silence among the darkness, shining the supreme light exceedingly brightly; and among the altogether insipid and unseen, they abundantly fill sightless minds with beauty beyond beauty<sup>5</sup> (*MT* I 997a-997b).

The defining characteristic of 'unknowing' centers on being's existential need to move outside of itself and into the beyond-being. Yet this 'seeking' on the part of being is not one-sided: the beyond-being 'leads.' Being's recognition of its need to be led, of the actuality of its being led, blends the grace of the beyond-being with the knowledge of being: the result is unknowing. In seeking to get beyond itself, being seeks the interior nature of being, no longer the exterior appearance of being: the inner nature of being as the erotic and creative presence of the beyond-being and the essential union of all distinctions. Unknowing realizes the utter transcendence in the immanence of the beyond-being, and the unavoidable mystery of affirmative and negative predication: whether descending by means of kataphasis into the immanent presence of the beyond-being or ascending by means of apophasis into the transcendent presence of the beyond-being,

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<sup>1</sup> cf. *CH* II; and Louth *Origins*, 167-8. Golitzin *Et Introibo*, 105-108.

<sup>2</sup> cf. *CH* II.

<sup>3</sup> cf. *DN* 680b-680d; *EH* III, 428c. This is odd because he has suggested it elsewhere, but never actually done it. See Rorem *Commentary*, 184-5.

<sup>4</sup> *πῶν μυστικῶν λόγων*: 'mystical words', 'mystical oracles', 'sayings with hidden meanings'.

knowledge meets its limit in being, yet is led beyond mind, matter and language, beyond the mystery of logic, to a celebrative silence of the beyond-being. The mystery of theology, of God-logic, is veiled by this reality of the beyond-being wearing no longer the garb of being: being is man's theology tutor, for it is within the mystery of -beings' participation with and praise of the beyond-being- that the hidden mysteries of theology are to be found.<sup>6</sup>

*Ep.* I to Gaius speaks to this issue from an epistemological perspective:

The unseen darkness is with the light, even more so with more light: knowledge hides the unknowing, even more so with more knowledge. These things are transcendent, not according to privation, but in a way which is beyond-truth; for the unknowing concerning God eludes the ones having being, light and knowledge of being. And being beyond, his darkness is covered with light, hidden in all knowledge. And if having come together some one sees God, the one having seen him has not really seen him, but knows some being of his: he himself is beyond being firmly established, beyond mind and being. In general, with him there is no knowing and no being; he is beyond-being, known beyond mind. And the unknowing according to the greater whole is knowledge of the one beyond all things being known (1065a-1065b).<sup>7</sup>

Denys seems to speak of unknowing as knowledge which knows what it itself is: knowledge is of being and in being, which is ikonicon of the beyond-being, and is therefore neither strictly of and in being (because of being's ikonicon nature) nor is it

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<sup>5</sup> τῶν ὑπερκάλων ἀγλαϊῶν

<sup>6</sup> Denys turns from addressing God to addressing *Τιμόθεε*, presumably the Timothy of the New Testament. From this point forward, the treatise has the feel of being a theological synopsis which might have been composed particularly for the purpose of instructing a younger and less spiritually erudite disciple, though the inscription to the work seems to have been something like *Διονυσίου Ἀρεοπαγίτου ἐπισκόπου Ἀθηνῶν πρὸς Τιμόθεον ἐπίσκοπον Ἐφέσου*, which suggests a hierarchical equality (Heil and Ritter *CD* II, 141, critical apparatus). Nevertheless, the treatise seems to be dedicated to the task of explicating, as much as possible, his understanding of the work of theology, primarily in terms of epistemic and linguistic advice.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Rorem, *op cit.*, 7-8. "On the one hand, this kind of verbal gymnastics, like oxymorons and multiple negatives, seems designed to stretch one's language and thought, and sometime to hinder and to still the natural conceptual process. On the other hand, the author does work with a coherent and comprehensive view of knowledge that can embrace and reconcile these apparent contradictions" (8).



completely devoid of ambiguity. The darkness of unknowing is within knowing as the soul of knowledge, as it were; the beyond-being is all in all. Thus he is known in what he is not –in being as beyond-being, in knowledge as beyond-knowledge; and, therefore, the nature of being and knowledge is essentially ambiguous being part affirmation and part negation.

*Ep. V* treats this as well, referring to the manner in which Paul knew God unknowingly:

being truly among that which is beyond sight and knowledge, knowing this alone: that he is after (*meta*) all things empirical and rational. . .in this manner it is said that the Divine Paul knew God, knowing him beyond all being, thought and knowledge. . .because having found the one beyond all he knew this beyond mind: that being the Cause of all things he is beyond all things (1073a-1076a).<sup>8</sup>

Denys very clearly presents unknowing as fullness: unknowing is not an epistemic void, but the ultimate height of knowing culminating in the assertion that God as Cause is beyond all that he causes. Unknowing is not 'release' from the process of knowing but the end result of knowing being as the ikon of the beyond-being, of the process of relational beauty.

Continuing with the *MT*, Denys begins instructing Timothy on achieving this result:

On the one hand I pray these things for me; but you on the other hand, Timothy my friend, forsake both the empirical and the rational activities by means of an earnest study concerning these mysterious sights,<sup>9</sup> everything empirical and rational, and all non-being as well as all being. Regarding the union, unknowingly raise<sup>10</sup> (yourself) as much as possible, to the one beyond all being and knowledge: you will be uplifted<sup>11</sup> from yourself and from all things by means of an irrepressible and insipid utter astonishment regarding the beyond-being of the

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<sup>8</sup> Rorem, *op cit.*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> τὰς αἰσθησεις, τὰς νοερὰς ἐνεργείας

<sup>10</sup> ἀνατάθητι

<sup>11</sup> ἀναχθήσῃ

divine in splendid darkness,<sup>12</sup> having pardoned all things and been freed from all things. . . It is proper to reckon<sup>13</sup> and to affirm all being against It, having affirmed It<sup>14</sup> as Cause of all things; but it is even more valid, to negate all these, as [the] beyond-being against all things; not supposing that the affirmations are in contradiction with<sup>15</sup> the negations, but [being] much prior, the Cause of all is beyond privations, beyond all negations and beyond all affirmations (*MT* I.1, 997b-1000a).<sup>16</sup>

Denys' prayer requests that the Trinity lead 'us' to the mystery of the scriptures, then he advises Timothy on the method of doing so: unknowing is achieved, so it seems, both through grace and through grit, the result of a synergistic process entirely at odds with any notion of logic. Denys emphasizes two notions: 'forsaking' and 'raising'.

*Ἀπόλειπε* ('forsake') seems to be used so that the tension between the need to forsake and the impossibility of forsaking is not at all veiled. There is an existential angst that must be accompanied by faith. Yet the image that Denys intends to carve with this term might be of a dying man who is by means of his death leaving his possessions to someone else. Rather than implying irresponsibility as though the man were forsaking his family contemptuously or out of greed, it would imply a sober responsibility: 'Put yourself in order Timothy, as a man who must put his household in order before his death.' It is as though Denys sees this as something that needs to be done, but done well and responsibly. 'Forsake': not to deny the nature of being as though it were mere illusion, but to participate properly and more fully with the beyond-being who is revealed in and through it as an archetype in its ikon. 'Forsake': not to earn favor with the beyond-being, but to more fully accept the gifting of the beyond-being itself in and through being. Just as one must die in a spatio-temporal manner to live everlastingly, so too one must 'die' in a rational and empirical manner to

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<sup>12</sup> *σκότους ἀκτῖνα*

<sup>13</sup> *τιθέναι*: elsewhere this is taken as 'to establish.'

<sup>14</sup> *θεσεις*

<sup>15</sup> *ἀντικειμένως*

unknowingly-know the beyond-being: Denys' ecstasy seems intentionally to be an ikon of death, 'death' to knowledge. This dying to knowledge seems to be what Denys conceives of as 'raising,' *ἀνατάθῃτι*. These seem to be one action, of which the forsaking is the apophatic aspect of the action, and the raising is the kataphatic. Both aspects of this action are required because of the ikonicon nature of being. 'Forsake' because of ikon. 'Raise' because of ikon. Being-as-ikon is concerned with this existential tension, not with whether or not language when it speaks of ikon is speaking univocally or equivocally because an ikon as a symbol which reveals in part that from which it issues as an effect cannot contradict another ikon because neither can be utterly univocal nor equivocal: this could only be the case either if at least one of them contained completely the whole of the Cause of which they are both effects or if at least one of them was completely devoid of it. The notion of being as ikon disallows both suppositions, and since ikon is posterior as effect of the beyond-being-Cause-of-being, then the Cause itself is anterior to the logic of being, and therefore anterior to contradiction. It follows then that it must not be assumed that negations are in contradiction to the affirmations which they deny; for the subject is not a being, nor therefore is it something that can be known: the beyond-being is unknowingly perceived by means of knowing, and so is hymned in ignorance (unknowing).

*1.1. Being-as-ikon and Logical Contradiction*

In *De Interpretatione*, Aristotle presents an argument that might be seen as taking to task such an approach.<sup>17</sup> But his is a propositional approach that is concerned with what propositions state: propositions that are contradictory, therefore, state nothing. Denys, however, sees the issue in terms of being-as-ikon, rather than strictly in terms of propositions, i.e. for Denys affirmations and negations are not propositionally contradictory, but rather ikonically complimentary utterances, as it were, which 'state' the beyond-being by means speaking it in praise. An utterance which 'states' the beyond-being, for Denys, is,

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<sup>16</sup> cf. Rorem, *op cit.*, 185-6; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *SchMT*, 417.2, 243; Louth, *Origins*, 175 (as regards 'ecstasy').

<sup>17</sup> cf. Luibheid and Rorem, 136, note 6.

therefore, revelatory, rather than propositional: as ikon, it reveals the mystery of the beyond-being. For Aristotle, kataphasis and apophasis are contradictory. Assuming, for example, that  $A$  is a kataphatic proposition and  $\sim A$  is an apophatic proposition, Aristotle posits that these two propositions are opposites of one another, i.e. both of them cannot logically hold: one is logically true, the other is logically false. Depending on the subject of the propositions, time might well be crucial, but for propositions having to do with logical relations, which are not at all dependent on time, such as ' $1 + 1 = 2$ ', time is inconsequential. If the concern is the location of a cardinal at time  $t_1$  and  $t_2$ , we might well derive propositions such as  $A$  and  $\sim A$ , each proposition being equally true without contradiction. This, however, is not Aristotle's concern.  $A$  and  $\sim A$  each have an identical subject and predicate and are *logically*, not *temporally*, incompatible. Hence, such statements would be contradictory just in case they are *simultaneous*, i.e.  $A \cdot \sim A$  at  $t_n$  here now. Take 'Andromeda' as subject and 'our closest galactic neighbor' as predicate. Either it is the case that Andromeda is our closest galactic neighbor, or it is not. Let  $A$  be the affirmative of these two propositions, and  $\sim A$  the negative. If both  $A$  and  $\sim A$  are maintained, then the conclusion  $A \cdot \sim A$  is unintelligible, and therefore meaningless; it amounts to nothing more than sophistry. Thus, together with the principles of reason, the *law of excluded middle* and the *law of non-contradiction*, it is maintained that one statement rises to the level of bearing the truth-value 'true', and that the other, therefore, by default, bears the truth-value 'false': ' $\sim(A \cdot \sim A)$ ' (law of non-contradiction), and ' $A \vee \sim A$ ' (law of excluded middle). Proper thought and speech hinge, therefore, on these two principles, for Aristotle.

Denys' position seems to suggest that such adherence to these laws misrepresents the nature of being-as-ikon. 'Forsake': neither to deny nor to affirm, but to praise the beyond-being by means of being. Aristotle's is a position that is thoroughly in and of being, seeing no need to get beyond being: his is not an ikonic theory of being, knowledge and language. The method that Denys is sharing with Timothy is one that demands a redefining of the parameters of reason

and experience and a high degree of epistemic vulnerability, a methodological element which has no place in Aristotle's system.

[I]t is plain that every affirmation has an opposite denial, and similarly every denial an opposite affirmation. We will call such a pair of propositions a pair of contradictories. Those positive and negative propositions are said to be contradictory which have the same subject and predicate. The identity of subject and predicate must not be equivocal.<sup>18</sup>

The proximity of Andromeda to our galactic neighborhood cannot be both nearest and not-nearest. It is senseless to affirm an equivocal identity between the subject, 'Andromeda', and the predicate, 'closest galactic neighbor.' With this much Denys would most likely agree: but there is an essential difference between being and the beyond-being-Cause-of-being, not that the former is subject to the laws of logic whereas the latter is not, but that contradiction can *only* have a place in being; for since being is consequent to the Cause of being, which transcends the logic of being, then the notion of contradiction, relative only to being, inherently misrepresents the nature of being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being and is in this manner applied to the beyond-being. Negation is not simply the opposite of affirmation for Denys, it is the result; the ikonic nature of being requires both the affirmation of the beyond-being according to being as well as the negation of the beyond-being according to being.<sup>19</sup> As the beyond-being is inseparably related to being, so too is unknowing inseparable from knowing; and the contrary is true as well: as being is inseparably related to the beyond-being, so too is knowing inseparable from unknowing, a sort of Dionysian principle of inseparability.

The unknowing aspect of Denys' theory of knowledge being quite distinct from the former, discursive approach, which employs all the faculties of sense awareness and reason, is decidedly non-discursive. But this difference in form only accentuates their functional similarity. The manner in which being is dealt with has a direct result on the manner in which the beyond-being is dealt with:

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<sup>18</sup> Aristotle *De Interpretatione* 17a (31-36).

without discursive participation in the downward procession, non-discursive participation in the upward return would be impossible. And, *visé versa*: without the possibility of upward participation, the notion of downward participation would be meaningless. The manner in which being relates to beyond-being as transcendent is dependent upon the way that being relates to it as immanent (i.e., in and through being-as-ikon of the beyond-being). Likewise, the manner in which being relates to beyond-being as immanent is dependent upon the way that being relates to it as transcendent. The discursive pursuit of the beyond-being thus continues, according to Denys' non-Aristotelian form of 'logic', non-discursively.

For example, by means of rational analysis the conclusion that the predicate 'cause' is applicable to the subject 'God' can be determined because causation terminology is used kataphatically to convey statements about causes and effects. Given certain circumstances, eg., empirical analysis can lead to the conclusion that wind causes a tree's leaves to fall. Thus, it might be said 'The wind is the cause of falling leaves.' But when speaking of the beyond-being as the Cause of all being, the predicate is applied differently. Both wind and trees exist spatio-temporally, and are themselves spatio-temporal. Denys assumes that the beyond-being is not spatio-temporal and that being is. The predicate 'cause' as applied to the beyond-being can be applied only in an analogical sense: 'God is the Cause of all things' has meaning because it is known what it means for something to cause something else; yet it has meaning unknowingly because it is not known the manner in which the beyond-being is Cause of being. Getting beyond statements such as 'God is the cause of all things' requires an unknowing move that translates into something like this: 'God is not the cause of all things in the way that the wind is the cause of a tree's leaves falling.' Unknowing is the result of having been led by perception and reason to the beyond-being. The journey of getting beyond these things epistemically is one which progresses linguistically by means of *apophasis*, and there are two parts of the apophatic process: (i) empirical apophasis, and (ii) rational apophasis.

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<sup>19</sup> cf. Rorem, *op cit.*, 188.

## 2. Apophasis

Whatever becomes known by means of sense-awareness and reason is spoken of kataphatically, and according to the method of unknowing such statements are apophasized,<sup>20</sup> a process which is illustrated in *MT* by reference to Moses' Sinaitic ascent.

The divine Moses is commanded first to purify himself and to be separated from the ones who are not purified. And after every purification, he hears the polyphony of trumpets, he sees many pure lights flashing and many-flowing rays. He is then separated from the many; and with the chosen holy ones he arrives at the summit of divine ascents: and in these he does not come to God himself, but contemplates not him (for he is unseen), but the place where he is. (But this I believe shows that the most divine and highest of the things being seen and discerned are certain hypothetical expressions<sup>21</sup> about the things which have been substituted for the one beyond all things. And through these his presence is shown beyond all thought, having taken his stand upon the perceptible heights of his most holy places). And then he is set free from the ones seeing and from the things being seen and slips into the truly mysterious darkness of unknowing, according to which he shuts away all known objections, becoming invisible in the altogether unseen, beyond every being of all things. And he is nothing, neither himself nor the other, uniting himself entirely by the unknowing inactivity of all knowing according to that which is more excellent to perceive: knowing beyond mind (*MT* I, 1000c-1001a).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> E.g., assume that 'nine-ness' is a metaphysical entity, meaning that it might well be an object of either perception, conception or both, but that it is neither merely empirical nor merely rational. 'Nine-ness', then, could be spoken of in a perceptually kataphatic manner as follows: 'There are seven loaves and two fishes.' This is a particular instantiation of 'nine-ness', assuming elementary arithmetical skills of addition. Using this example, one could further assert that ' $7 + 2 = 9$ ', which itself is an abstraction of the mathematical qualities of the first statement; thus making this latter statement by nature conceptually kataphatic. The next step requires a belief in something like Plato's ideas, in which case a statement like this would be accurate: '9 is not nine-ness.' What has happened here? Having begun with a perception, the perceptually kataphatic statement is apophasized, resulting in a kataphatically conceptual statement.

<sup>21</sup> cf. Andia, op cit., 344-48: 'les raisons hypothétiques' for λόγοι ὑποθετικοί.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Rorem, op cit., 189-92; Louth, *Origins*, 173-4, *Denys*, 100-01; Rorem and Lamoreaux, *SchMT*, 421.1, 244; Andia *Henosis*, 341-54.

Moses' ascent accents three existential elements of unknowing, forming together an epistemic ethic of unknowing, as it were: purification, illumination and union.<sup>23</sup> Moses forsakes all things empirical, then all things rational and finally entrusts himself to union with the beyond-being: first empirical apophasis, then rational apophasis, then the union of unknowing. The paradigm that Denys is working with is an obviously hierarchical one. Moses, 'purifies himself' of the empirical elements of worship: i.e. by means of them he goes into them to contemplate the One who dwells within them, and so is united with the beyond-being. The process of achieving unknowing is a synergistic one because being and knowing are essentially relational and communicative processes. Moses rises to the level of unknowing; he is not, however, passively translated to these spiritual heights, but chooses both to begin and to continue the ascent, being in no way compelled to do so. It must be assumed though that such an unknowing height has its trough as well: for Moses indeed does descend from his experience, back into the rational and the empirical. Theology, for St. Denys, is not a 'head-game' only, or as Lossky puts it, it is "not simply a question of a process of dialectic,"<sup>24</sup> but a way of life, a way of leading one's life. If Denys' theory remained solely concentrated on knowing God, then theology could be rightly described in this manner, but with his emphasis on unknowing union it cannot. His is a notion of theology which sees the process of participating with the beyond-being as being a fundamentally existential process: the purpose of theology is union with God. Thus, Moses does not merely think on the things of God, but gives himself over totally to him: his ascent is not a thought experiment in which he ascends only in a mental capacity, *via* abductive, inductive, deductive argumentation, symbolic notation *et alia*, but one in which he fully participates: *he* (the person 'Moses') makes the ascent. Denys' theory of knowledge is not one that allows knowledge to

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<sup>23</sup> cf. "Moses as the Paradigm for the Liturgical Spirituality of Pseudo-Dionysius" *Studia Patristica* 18.2 (Peeters: 1989), 275-79; and J. Daniélou "Moïse: Exemple et figure chez Grégoire de Nysse" *Cahiers sioniens* 8 (1964), 262-82.

<sup>24</sup> V. Lossky *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (New York, SVS: 1976), 27.



be an end in itself, therefore. It is a means to an end: the end of becoming 'a partaker of the divine nature.'<sup>25</sup>

### 2.1. 'Sculptor' Analogy

A very apt analogy which Denys uses in chapter two of *MT* characterizes this point well. If we could be like Moses, the analogy suggests, then we would be 'just as the ones creating a statue of natural things, removing everything that is an obstruction to the true sight of that which is hidden, and revealing this hidden beauty by means of negation alone' (*MT* II, 1025b).<sup>26</sup> The idea seems evidently to be of a sculptor creating a sculpture; but although the analogy might seem to work best by taking it in this sense, it is no less effective, albeit not as explicit, if taken to refer to the creative process in general.<sup>27</sup> Its chief import lies in its emphasis upon apophasis as a necessary methodological aspect of the creation process. Denys' primary interest is in a 'theological' creativity, rather than some artistic or scientific form, but his theory seems to recognize these other forms to be ikons of the theological: they would tell the same story of negation.

The question arises then as to what it is that Denys is referring to in terms of a medium of theological creation? The sculptor uses marble, metal or some such material; the painter, paints; the writer, words; the musician, music; the scientist, nature (Einstein used nature in terms of light, gravity, time, et cetera).<sup>28</sup> Denys' take on the process of apophasis in terms of theological creativity would indeed differ from these other modes in at least one important manner. His is an apophatic creative process that does not create something which is at all external to the creator: the analogy cannot be pressed so far as to imply that theological creation as creation in any other sense produces that which has been mentally/emotionally conceived. In a sense, theological creativity does not produce anything: it does not realize a final product. For the theologian's subject is God, and if he is to faithfully represent this subject, then he cannot represent it

<sup>25</sup> II Pt. 1.14.

<sup>26</sup> cf. Rorem, op cit., 193-4; Louth *Denys*, 106-07, *Origins*, 174 (in both places Louth refers to Plotinus' usage of this analogy in *Enneads* 1.6.9). See also Plotinus *The Enneads* 1.6.9. and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Moses*.

<sup>27</sup> Luibheid makes this clear in his trans., taking *ποιῶντες* as 'sculpting.'

at all; to do so as does a poet or a musician is not to produce a creative masterpiece but to produce an idol.<sup>29</sup> Denys emphatically does not mean for the analogy to convey the meaning that the theologian would be sculpting the beyond-being. The sculptor, the scientist, the poet, the musician, the painter each creates the thing of which it is his/her occupation's purpose to produce -a sculpture, a physical law, a poem, a piece of music, a painting- each revealing a beauty that prior to the creative process was hidden, which is indeed the purpose of the theologian as well. That which is revealed by the artist, scientist, poet, musician, painter however is empirical and rational (at least partially so), while that which is revealed by the theologian is utterly beyond being either empirical or rational: *it is beyond-being*. The theologian (Moses e.g.) doesn't have anything to show for his labors: Moses doesn't descend Mt. Sinai with a fine representation of the One whose back he has just seen, as the sculptor, the scientist, the poet, the musician or the painter might do after having an 'inspirational moment'. Beauty in these latter instances is mediate-able through material, language and mathematics. But beauty in the theological sense, however, the beauty with which Moses met on the mountain, is not at all mediate-able through material, language and reason: no matter what Moses is ever able to write, draw, paint, compose or calculate with regard to his experience of beauty none of it will ever capture the fullness of the beauty of the beyond-being *in toto*, as a sculpture might well be said to have captured the beauty of an ox pulling a plow, a child kissing her mother, or as a scientist might well be said to discern the beauty of gravity or electromagnetism, or other such things with the poet, the painter, the musician and other 'creators.' For Moses has met not with a certain aspect of the process of relational beauty, but with the source and end of the process itself. His is a dilemma that is not so confounding as it is awe inspiring: he is to become synergistically a pure, illumined and united ikon of the infinite presence of the process of relational beauty. The scientists' worth, or that of the painter, the sculptor, the poet or the

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<sup>28</sup> See chapter 3.

musician, is measured by that which he creates; a theologian's, however, is measured by that whom he is becoming (in terms of growing into the likeness of the beyond-being).

With what does this 'removal' take place? The theologian's task is to remove himself as that which obstructs the view of the beyond-being, and in doing so he synergistically creates his true self. The primary tools of the sculpting trade, or those of painting, making poems, being a scientist or painter, are not difficult to discern. For example: Michelangelo used a chisel to reveal his *La Pietà*; Einstein used Riemannian geometry, the Ricci tensor, Newton's gravitational constant and more to sculpt the general theory of relativity; Joyce used words, acute observation, reason to write his *Dubliners*. For Denys the tools that the theologian uses are language (synthetic and analytic judgments) and knowledge (*a priori* and *a posteriori*). Like the sculptor's chisel or the scientist's blackboard, however, language and knowledge are dispensable for the theologian. But, like the chisel and the blackboard (or whatever—a chip of bone and the sand on the ground), language and knowledge are likewise necessary. In each case the work for which these tools are employed is *apophatic*: each specialist uses the tools of his trade to *deny* in order to reveal *affirmatively* that beauty which is hidden.

## 2.2. God-logic (θεολογία): Theological Creation

Apophatic truth and synergism,<sup>30</sup> are crucial aspects in Denys' notion of theological creation. The synergistic element emphasizing relational response ethically colors his epistemology, both in terms of the way that he views the work of theology as well as in terms of the way that he views the ontological movement of theology.

Denys illustrates with Moses that the focus of his theory of knowledge is not on knowing *about* the beyond-being, but on freely becoming a *partaker of it*: participating both by knowing and by unknowing. The analogy illustrates this, but

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<sup>29</sup> Marion's work is indispensable on this point. See *Dieu sans l'être* and *L'idole et la distance* (esp. 139-95 of the latter). Both are available in translation (trans. Thomas A. Carlson), from Chicago and Fordham, respectively.

<sup>30</sup> Concerning this notion of working with God, see *CH* III, 2, 165b, 3, 168a; VII.4 212a; *EH* II, 4, 393c.

emphasizes the unique nature of unknowing. A material is knowingly chosen to sculpt, but the act of sculpting achieves unknowing: the material must be denied to reveal the beauty which is hidden within its appearance. Moses might have remained at the bottom of the mountain affirming God according to empirical and rational perception; but apart from denying *himself* unknowingly and synergistically he could never have ascended to the heights of his Sinaitic experience. As one who creates in terms of God-logic (theology) he knowingly affirms the beauty of the beyond-being in himself, and is then required to sculpt that same material (his own being) in which he has seen the beauty of the beyond-being by means of synergistically conforming himself to It rather than conforming It to himself. The Moses paradigm is crucial for the theologian 'so that we may know in an unhidden manner that unknowing, being hidden from all knowing amongst all beings, and might see that beyond-being darkness, being hidden from every light amongst beings' (1025b).<sup>31</sup> Moses achieves this 'know[ing] in an unhidden manner, that unknowing being hidden from all knowing amongst beings,' and 'see[s] that beyond-being darkness, being hidden from every light amongst beings',<sup>32</sup> not unlike the manner in which a sculptor looks at a chunk of marble and sees the beauty which is hidden inside or the scientist looks at a mathematical equation and sees the beauty of some aspect of nature hidden inside. The theologian sees the beauty of the beyond-being hidden inside of all knowledge and language: prior to sculpting, the beauty (of the marble, equation or knowledge and speech) is known in a hidden manner, concealed in the darkness of the inner nature of the marble, the equation or the knowledge and speech, but when the work is done, it is known in an unhidden manner, and that darkness is revealed. Apophasis requires a process of *unlanguaging* and *unlearning*: kataphasis allows for a plethora of assertions and the theologian as the *knowing subject* is called to *unforget* the knowledge of the beyond-being (the *known subject*) as being totally other than and outside of his/her predicative abilities by

<sup>31</sup> ἵνα ἀπερικαλύπτως γινώμεν ἐκείνην τὴν ἀγνωσίαν τὴν ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν γνωστῶν ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς οὖσι περικεκαλυμμένην καὶ τὸν ὑπερουσίον ἐκεῖνον ἰδῶμεν γνόφον τὸν ὑπὸ παντός τοῦ ἐν τοῖς οὖσι φωτός ἀποκρυπτόμενον.

means of the process of apophasis. That which has been affirmed must be denied in participation:<sup>33</sup> short of being content with what can be known about the beyond-being, the theologian must move beyond knowledge of him and further into participation with him, laying aside the empirical and the rational epistemically, and ethically as well: the habits of the mind, according to Denys, cannot, therefore, be divorced from the habits of the body.

*2.3. Language-as-ikon and Theological Creation*

Why both modes of theological language? Denys' reasoning would seem to be quite simple, though subtle. His is an attempt, so it seems, to point out and to avoid two very extreme positions, which could be referred to as kataphatic literalism, on the one hand, and kataphatic symbolism, on the other. If one or the other of these is assumed to be the seed from which all theological truth grows, then consequences ensue which preclude any possibility for epistemic symmetry, which seems to be epistemologically axiomatic for Denys. Assuming the limits of kataphasis to be that of the literal results either in denial of the reality of God, at worst, or in a very shallow pool of theistic statements. On the other hand, assuming the limits of kataphasis to be that of the metaphorical and the analogical results in the problem of untailored verbosity: *theistic speech without limits*. Neither of these assumptions results in an adequate environment within which a philosophical theology that demands accurate knowledge *and* worshipful union finds any soil within which to root itself. The former disallows unfounded speculative thought, and the latter in turn is ultimately defined only by speculation. In both cases, the epistemic want of symmetry is abundant. However, making apophasis part of the locus of truth, creates a built-in corrective criterion for either of the above two consequences, and the final apophatic result affirms something of the beyond-being, at least in an inverted sense: either 'God is

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<sup>32</sup> MT 1025b (11-14).

<sup>33</sup> Apophaticism, viewed in this manner, is not unlike the way that Mark Twain *un*learns the American notion of the 'nigger slave' as a commodity. At one point, for example, Huck recognizes that 'nigger Jim's' mourning for his family is just like the way a 'white man' would mourn for his family. No longer was 'nigger' the opposite of 'white man,' nor was the 'white man' now the only truly human specimen. 'Human' took on a new meaning for Huck, and 'the nigger' was now part of it.

beyond our rational, empirical and linguistic faculties' or 'There is no God.' The former ensues from an apophatic endeavor that is working with a kataphatic endeavor; the latter from an apophatic endeavor which is working against a kataphatic endeavor. Thus, by implication it follows that to approach the work of theology as though a decision must be made between kataphasis and apophasis is to misconstrue the issue. Such an approach sets up a false dilemma, *either* theological kataphasis *or* theological apophasis (*either* the *via positiva* *or* the *via negativa*), and fails to recognize that the processes are both metaphysically, epistemologically (both rationally and empirically), linguistically, and, thus, philosophically and theologically, essential. Neither kataphasis nor apophasis can be rightly employed at the expense of the other: theology is dependent upon both modes of theological language usage for its ascent to the 'Sinaitic' heights.

But why, you might ask, having established the divine affirmations from among the first things do we begin the divine negation from the last things? Because to establish the one beyond all establishing from that which is more related to it, it is necessary to establish the hypothetical affirmations in order to negate the one negated beyond all negations from the ones being more different from it. For is it not more truly 'life' and 'goodness' than 'air' and 'stone'? And is it more truly not 'debauchery' and 'wrath' than not 'spoken' and not 'discerned'? (*MT* III, 1033c-1033d).<sup>34</sup>

The end of Moses' ascent is union with the beyond-being, achieved by means of moving epistemologically, linguistically and existentially away from the heights of kataphasis down to its lowly depths, and from these depths back again to the same heights in an apophatic manner. Beyond the frontiers of knowledge and kataphasis by means of being-as-ikon is apophasis and unknowing beyond being. Denys' position, so it seems, is therefore the methodological inverse of St. Anselm's famous dictum (notionally, but not terminologically, filched from St. Augustine): *fides quarens intellectum*. The theologian, for Denys, descends into

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<sup>34</sup> cf. Rorem, *op cit.*, 194-205.

knowledge and ascends into faith in and union with God. But there is also a constant interface between the two: kataphatic propositions are constantly being challenged by the apophatic propositions, and *vice versa*. The theological endeavor is antinomic, constantly being confronted with propositions which Aristotle would classify as contradictories. To take this path, for Denys, is to use logic as our philosophical scapegoat. From the very beginning, he has not attempted to mince words: God is *ὑπερούσιος* ('beyond-being'). Thus, by logical implication, such a position requires that empiricism and rationalism be cast ultimately as insufficient, albeit necessary, tools of the theological endeavor.

### *2.3.1. Empirical Apophasis*

This is not optional, for Denys; rather, it is logically and rationally necessary. Rather than requiring that the Subject be reduced to the scope of the tools, Denys' position requires the theologian to entrust himself to the scope of his Subject. If God is beyond-being, then it follows that a philosophical examination of such a reality would require a greater degree of precision than empirical kataphasis is *able* to provide. Thus, to that which is seemingly known about him in an empirical manner and to the empirical affirmations made about him *apophasis* must be applied.

This is the case for two reasons. First, apophasis must be applied because the nature of the analysis is *philosophical*. If our analysis was of an exclusively systematic, historical or practical bent, for example, rather than one which has as its primary focus a critically *constructive* mapping of the beyond-being, then a recourse to apophasis would be dictated by the context of our analysis, not by the nature of the analysis, as with philosophical analysis. Secondly, apophasis must be applied because the nature, or *ousia*, of the thing being analyzed is empirically indistinct: it is not discernible *via* sensory perception (i.e. by empirical means), except by means of analogy. Thus, for a refined analogical understanding of God, apophasis must be applied to these analogies.

This is the subject of *MT IV*, quoted here in full.

Thus, we say that the cause of all things is beyond all being: it is neither beingless nor lifeless, nor logicless, nor mindless; it is neither body nor form; it has neither shape, nor quality, quantity or mass; it is neither a place, nor is it seen, nor does it have empirical senses; it is neither sensed nor empirical; neither does it have disorder and perplexity being disturbed by passions of physical things; it is neither powerless on account of being subject to empirical calamities; nor is it light in deficiency; neither is it nor does it have other things such as corruption, division, privation, diminution; nor is it something else of the empirical things (1040d).

This chapter begins with what might seem to be some ironic kataphatic assertions couched as double-negatives. But these affirmations are of the rational sort: they are more accurate affirmations than the analogical, empirical affirmations. It is more accurate, both with regard to the ontology of the beyond-being, as it were, and with regard to the attempt to map accurately the ontogeography of the beyond-being, as it were, i.e. both metaphysically and epistemologically, to deny the latter affirmations in favor of maintaining the former. The apophatic process begins by means of discerning degrees of accuracy, a hierarchy of truth, between empirical and rational predication. It is affirmed that God exists (goodness?),<sup>35</sup> lives, speaks or has linguistic abilities and has a mind. It might, then, be less irony than it is pedagogy that Denys opens this chapter with these rational affirmations: it seems merely an emphatic way to show the nature of the process of relational beauty with regard to the notion of truth (i.e., the manner in which the apophatic process works in relation to the kataphatic process).

Following these opening affirmations, a list of empirical qualities is denied of God. Some of what is denied bears an obvious air of accuracy. For in a monotheistic position, one would be hard-pressed to affirm of God, the *hyper-*

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<sup>35</sup> An implicit connection with what he says at the end of chapter three? cf. *DN IV*; eg.: 'all beings, as many as there are, are good and come from the Good' (720b, 9).



Cause, for example, that he has a body.<sup>36</sup> But some of the rest of what is denied might not seem so obvious. However, if the rest of the denials are understood with reference to this first denial, then this seems to be a whole series of accurate denials. If it is the case that God is a bodiless entity or being, then he would not be of any shape, form, quality, quantity or mass: he could not be seen with the eyes nor touched with the hands, etc. And if the notions of 'disorder' and 'perplexity' are taken in reference to the lack of a bodily existence, these might well be found to be accurate denials. For it seems senseless to affirm that a bodiless being could have some sort of bodily disorder or be perplexed over his physical condition.<sup>37</sup> The same may be said, furthermore, of 'passions:' this can seemingly be understood only with reference to the bodily desires and where there is no such body, it would seem as well that there would be no such passions. It would seem, moreover, that the pseudo-affirmation of power with regard to 'empirical

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<sup>36</sup> This is, however, taken quite seriously in process thought. Cf., e.g., Alfred North Whitehead *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1969) and Charles Hartshorne *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: SUNY, 1984). Although their versions of process theism do differ significantly, the 'body' of God in each of their systems turns out to be nothing other than the cosmos. Constructing a theistic system such as this has, in my opinion, dire implications for traditional theism, the most uncanny of which is that God is reduced, at least partly (ie. in his 'consequent' or 'contingent' nature) to the confines of cosmological design. And this, in turn, has quite a profound effect on the other part of God (i.e. his 'antecedent' or 'necessary' nature), such that divine necessity is constrained by divine contingency. Respecting the merits of this position, it is, in my mind, nevertheless, a mistake to take process thought to be anything more than a contemporary effort to make theology systematically respectable in the face of the scientific systems of the day. Process theism seems to me to be a departure from the divine mystery in favor of deductive methodology.

<sup>37</sup> But such a being could plausibly experience bodily disorder and perplexity, especially an omnipotent, omnipresent, incorporeal 'being'. For example, such a 'being' might, in some manner that does not necessitate his being bodily, experience the undue suffering of an innocent toddler who is dying a slow and arduous death because of the ruthless whims of his own country's political leader (e.g., Saddam Hussein's usage of chemical warfare upon his own countrymen in the early 1990's). The broader point here is that the disturbance and perplexity which might refer to what is commonly known as the *problem of evil* (both of the moral as well as the natural sort) is not the sort of thing that God would be devoid of by necessity of his essential separateness. Thus, though he might not have a body which itself would undergo such disorders and perplexities, he has our bodies within which to do so. Moreover, though this is even further afield than the present point, it is nevertheless the case that the problem of evil was experienced quite keenly when the Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on a body himself, dwelling here and meeting his own demise at the hands of those who wrongfully accused him and required that he be punished by crucifixion. This is no small issue for Denys, either, though he does not touch on the matter here. His *DN* treats this 'problem' at length (IV, 19, 716bff). Cf. *DN* 713D-736B. His discussion, nevertheless, does not treat the notion of divine participation as here noted; it is, however, a notion which is might be implied from his metaphysics as a whole.

calamities' could be taken in the same manner. For where there is no sense perception, there would be no calamities caused by sensing things. Nor would there be any power, nor powerlessness, regarding the lack of such experiences. Again, if 'light' is to be understood in reference to body, as, for example, 'light perceived by the eye,' then this too would seem to be an accurate denial: for lacking eyes, such a being as the 'Cause of all' would not be deprived of light.<sup>38</sup> And finally, a bodiless 'Cause of all' would neither undergo corruption, division, privation, diminution, at least in the way that these terms would be understood in reference to 'body, or sense perception. Thus, given this manner of relating each ensuing denial to the denial of embodiment, it seems that this is an accurate series of denials: it refines the scope of the beyond-being, and approaches a more accurate mapping of the ontogeography of the beyond-being, as it were.

Denys has accomplished his task: he shows both that the supreme Cause is very different from all other perceptible entities and beings, and that perceptual terminology cannot be consistently and accurately applied to the *hyper*-Cause. Furthermore, whatever we affirm of God by means of perceptual analogy must, therefore, ultimately be denied: such affirmations must, because of ontological necessity (i.e., because of the epistemic and semantic burden to more accurately map the ontogeography of the beyond-being), be transcended by negation.

### *2.3.2. Rational Apophasis*

Denys turns next to *rational apophasis*. Here too he continues by means of degrees of accuracy. The rational affirmations at the beginning of chapter four have provided the framework for the way in which the apophatic process is to proceed (or ascend), and are themselves not excluded from the process: these affirmations must be denied as well. A similar pattern emerges here as with chapter four: a higher degree of affirmation set against a lower degree of

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<sup>38</sup> The eye is only one example of many that could be offered. We might speak of 'light' as a life-giving element of nature (understanding nature to be composed of all sorts of 'bodies'). With this example as well, God would not be deprived of such a life-giving element; for he is bodiless. And this life-giving element would seem to be life-giving only in reference to bodies. Thus, deprivation has no place.

affirmation. There is an affirmation that is more accurate than rational affirmations. This affirmation is, however, at best tacit in the present chapter. It nevertheless seems to have been presented in a formulation dealt with in Moses' ascent: empirical purification in terms of rational illumination in terms of transcendent perfection (union). The kataphatic way leads from the most accurate affirmations (theses) down to the least accurate affirmations: the movement is epistemologically, linguistically and ontologically, away from transcendence toward reason and sense-perception, i.e. toward divine immanence. The apophatic way, requiring the opposite movement, commences its *ascent* toward the transcendent from the empirical to the rational. It is now requisite that the movement proceed apophatically into the rational and affirm the transcendent: again the movement epistemologically, linguistically and ontologically, has been away from *empirical* immanence toward *rational* immanence, and is now from rational immanence toward *non-empirical* and *non-rational* transcendence. This is the way Moses enters into the divine darkness by means of and in intimate relation with kataphasis and rational apprehension of the beyond-being.

An initial reading of the final chapter of *MT* might well leave the reader a bit stunned: stunned by the quixotic wonder of what he is dealing with. It might, on the other hand, leave the reader a bit dismayed by the lack of precision and apparent contradictions (i.e. by the apparent nonsense of what he is affirming). It is a queer chapter, but as much can be said of the whole of *MT*. The text of this chapter is very short, and is here translated in its entirety.

But again climbing higher we say this: it is neither soul nor mind; neither does it have imagination nor opinion nor logic nor mind; it is neither logic nor intelligence, nor is it spoken or discerned; it is neither number nor order nor greatness nor smallness nor equality nor inequality nor likeness nor unlikeness nor established nor moved nor does it take rest; neither does it have power, nor is it power nor light; it is neither alive nor is it life; it is neither being, nor eternity, nor time; of it there is neither anything rational nor scientific; it is neither truth nor a kingdom nor wisdom; neither one nor unity; neither divinity nor goodness;

it is neither spirit (as known to us), nor sonship, nor fatherhood, nor some other of the things known (by us or someone else) of beings; it is neither something among non-beings, nor is it something among beings; it is neither known to beings, as it is, nor do beings know it, as beings are; of it there is neither logic nor name nor knowledge; it is neither darkness nor light, nor error nor truth; of it there is on the whole neither thesis nor negation; we neither establish it nor negate it, since the all-perfect and singular cause of all things is beyond every thesis, beyond every denial: the excess of that which totally transcends all things and is beyond the whole of things (*MT* V, 1045d-1048b).

This chapter is in some ways the most confounding of all in the *CD*. For it seems as though everything that has been affirmed has now been denied; nothing but ignorance and silence remains. What is it then that we are now conceiving of and talking about? Denys' answer would be rather terse and cryptic, possibly something like this: 'Nothing, because we are now no longer conceiving and speaking.' Although this might seem absolutely ridiculous as a response, it does seem to be implied by Denys' apophatic process: the height of the process of knowing is the stillness of unknowing. And the highest peak of apophasis is not a speakable peak: it is silent praise, there remaining nothing that can be understood or talked about, either empirically or rationally. The *hyper*-Cause is now being conceived of (if the usage of this term has any vestige of semantic value left) as being completely other than being: no perception or conception is in the final analysis at all accurately applicable to it. It is a mystery about which to wonder. This is the point of 'unknowing union' with God, and it is the purpose of the apophatic process of Denys' theory of knowledge. However, it does not follow from Denys' apophatic process that the kataphatic process is ultimately deemed to be a vain attempt to rationally apprehend God. For in this, i.e. in *knowing* God, it is successful. It is rather deemed to be a vain attempt at *trans*-rationally and *trans*-empirically apprehending God. The kataphatic process, then, is purposeful in rationally and empirically apprehending the self-revelation of the transcendent God in the created order: it is a ladder of Divine descent. And the apophatic process is purposeful in *trans*-rationally and *trans*-empirically apprehending the

nature of the immanent God in God's self: it is a ladder of Divine ascent. There seems then to be only one epistemic and linguistic ladder: its function, use and *telos* being two-fold. Apophasis begins in the empirical where the kataphatic becomes verbose, moving upward toward the rational, easing beyond it with each successive negation: kataphatic analogy forms the seed-bed for the apophatic ascent of unknowing. Kataphasis, however, begins with the most accurate affirmations and moves to the least accurate, while apophasis proceeds from the least accurate affirmations to the most accurate denials. This movement implies a notion of degrees as regards truth-conveyance: certain affirmations become more accurate than certain negations; and certain negations turn out to be more accurate than certain affirmations.

### 3. Summary

Denys' position is amenable to prepositional calculus. If God is both transcendent and immanent ( $G$ ), then the most appropriate epistemic and linguistic method would need to employ both kataphasis and the apophasis ( $M$ ):  $G \theta M$ . The employment of logic at this stage is not, however, an effort to vindicate the Dionysian position logically, but an effort to show how logic in the Dionysian position *necessarily* releases into a *trans*-logic or a *hyper*-logic, which is beyond that system of symbols, and also precedes it. For Denys, logic is firmly fitted within a metaphysical framework that is *trans*-logical. It is an effort, therefore, to evince the presuppositional error that is made when theism is constructed exclusively within the boundaries of reason, empiricism and logic. The logical contradiction is quite clear: God is both above logical norms and contained by them. But what does this mean? Is God *totally* ineffable and illogical? God is knowable and speakable, for Denys, 'through a glass darkly', as it were –i.e. through the 'glass' of being-as-ikon, as I have argued. Thus, from a Dionysian perspective, Christ's words to his disciples in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John, namely "If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine; and you shall *know* the truth, and the truth shall *set you free*" can be taken in this sense. The *logos theou* is *the* thing to be known for Denys, but this 'knowing'

cannot be subtracted from our humble offering of ourselves, i.e. of giving ourselves to become 'partakers of the divine nature.' The 'freedom,' therefore, which is sought from the epistemic tyranny of ignorance (as the antithesis of knowledge, not as the fulfillment, as with Denys' position), for example, is achievable not by containing God in our theistic philosophical systems, but by being contained in him, i.e. by 'abiding', and allowing our theistic 'systems' this same freedom. The adventure of knowing and speaking God is caught-up in the ontological mystery of God giving himself to being and in the ontological mystery of being giving itself to him: *epistemology, ethics, metaphysics* are knit together in a mystical fabric of ikon and communion (the process of relational beauty). This cryptic and philosophically convoluted process, the center point of which is his notion of ikon, is the way that the metaphysical rubber ultimately hits the epistemological road in the ethical traffic of everyday life, the way faith in the Messianic person of Jesus is actualized. This at least seems to be what Denys wants to suggest to his friend.

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From the discussion of Denys' philosophical theology, I shall take the notion of being-as-ikon and apply it to some related issues in western philosophy. In the chapter immediately following, I shall apply this notion to the problem of varieties of mystery, specifically in relation to rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon. Such an 'application', as I see it, is general in comparison to my treatments in chapters Four-Six, but shall serve to initiate, as it were, a shift in our discussion from Denys' position *per se* to a kataphatic discussion of his notion of ikon in relation to western philosophical thought. In the ensuing chapters (i.e. Four-Six), I shall apply the same notions, namely rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon, respectively, albeit apophatically. Furthermore, for the two reasons that I have enumerated here, namely that it is a 'general' application (for the purpose of shifting the discussion) and a 'kataphatic' one as well, the next chapter, though it too shall treat the notions of rational-ikon, empirical-ikon and language-as-ikon has been set apart, in contradistinction to the ensuing ones, as an

*Unknowing, Being and Ikon: Apophasis in Denys' Epistemology*

*Intermezzo.* Let us turn, then, to a treatment of the problem of varieties of mystery in relation to the notion of being-as-ikon.

*PART II*

*Denys' Mystery of Being-as-Ikon And Issues in Western  
Philosophy*



*Intermezzo: Mystery in Contemporary Philosophy and Denys' Notion of Ikon*

*1. Prolegomenon*

My interest here is to briefly examine three claims of mystery regarding, respectively, 'mind', 'matter' and 'language', and to suggest a Dionysian approach to them. The result of this chapter is that, by means of Denys' notion that mystery is an inherent aspect of being, i.e. *via* his notion of being-as-ikon, I offer an approach that suggests that these mysteries of being could be viewed in something of a univocal manner.

Denys' interest in mystery, together with his suggestion that the beyond-being is manifested through dissimilar as well as similar ikons, e.g. the presentation of him in the Old Testament as a 'drunkard', motivates an interest in investigating how this perspective might be brought to bear on other claims of mystery, and particularly claims which, first of all, are not themselves univocal, and which, secondly, are apparently quite dissimilar to Denys' own position. Can Denys' position treat examples of mystery which are dissimilar to it as well as dissimilar amongst themselves?

The mysteries to which we shall shortly turn could be classed together as mysteries of being because they each claim, for different reasons, a limitation with regard what can be known concerning the nature of being. Furthermore, because they treat the nature of being as such, they, therefore, seem to be approachable through the notion of the mystery of being-as-ikon. In this way, then, to respond to the question that I have just posed, I think that Denys' position can treat examples of mystery which are dissimilar to it as well as dissimilar amongst themselves. Beyond this, i.e. as in some sense revealing the mystery of being, I do not intend to claim that these mysteries are similar or related in anyway apart from viewing them in terms of Denys' notion of the mystery of being-as-ikon.

Denys' notion of the mystery of being *qua* being-as-ikon incorporates a metaphysic as well. I find this notion of being to be helpful because it implies that all being, both beings which are 'dissimilar' as well as beings which are 'similar' to the beyond-being, ikonically manifests the beyond-being. If being is ikonic in

this manner, then each instance of being, according to Dionysian thought, can count as being either a dissimilar ikon or a similar ikon of the beyond-being, which provides a kind or hermeneutical context, as it were, for dealing with the mystery of being. I suggest, therefore, that his notion of being-as-ikon provides a context within which one might view these distinct mysteries of being in a univocal sense.

Let us turn, now, to these mysteries of being.

## *2. Mystery of Being*

### *2.1. Mystery of Mind*

What is referred to by the notion/term 'mind'? Colin McGinn's *The Mysterious Flame* offers a plausible materialistic argument for conceiving of mind as an ambiguous reality that cannot be fully known.

In the first chapter of this text, McGinn offers a science-fiction parable which points out well, for him, the truly queer nature of mind:

"They're made out of meat."

"Meat?..."

"There's no doubt about it. We picked up several from different parts of the planet, took them aboard our recon vessels, probed them all the way through. They're completely meat."

"That's impossible. What about the radio signals? The messages to the stars?"

"They use the radio waves to talk, but the signals don't come from them. The signals come from machines."

"So who made the machines? That's who we want to contact."

"They made the machines. That's what I'm trying to tell you. Meat made the machines."

"That's ridiculous. How can meat make a machine? You're asking me to believe in sentient meat?"

"I'm not asking you, I'm telling you. These creatures are the only sentient race in the sector and they're made of meat."

"Maybe they're like the Orfolei. You know, a carbon-based intelligence that goes through a meat stage."

*Intermezzo: Mystery in Contemporary Philosophy and Denys' Notion of Ikon*

"Nope. They're born meat and they die meat. We studied them for several of their lifespans, which didn't take too long. Do you have any idea of the life span of meat?"

"Spare me. Okay, maybe they're only part meat. You know, like the Weddilei."

"But I told you, we probed them. They're meat all the way through."

"No brain?"

"Oh, there is a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat!"

"So... what does the thinking?"

"You're not understanding, are you? The brain does the thinking. The meat!"

"Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat!"

"Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Loving meat. Dreaming meat. The meat is the whole deal! Are you getting the picture?"<sup>1</sup>

The reality of consciousness, McGinn argues, is for most probably simply assumed. It "is so familiar" McGinn says "that it's hard to appreciate what an odd phenomenon it is. We tend to take our consciousness for granted and not wonder about its origins and grounds." Brain science and psychology in their own respective ways attempt to remedy this problem, namely how is it that 'meat' and 'thought' are connected? On the one hand, there is this material stuff that is, or can be made to be,<sup>2</sup> empirical. On the other, there is this mental-ness that we experience individually from the inside. Empirical analysis yields data about the former; and by means of introspection, we know something about the latter. But, McGinn asks, how does the body affect the mind, or the mind affect the body? For McGinn, this is not a philosophical *problem*. There is no solution to the quandary, he argues; but more importantly, for him, *there can be no solution*. In terms of the mind-body problem, McGinn contends that there is some 'property of the brain'

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<sup>1</sup> Colin McGinn *The Mysterious Flame* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 6-8. The quote comes from a story written by Terry Bisson, which Steven Pinker uses in his *How the Mind Works* (New York: Norton, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> The brain under normal circumstances is not something that is an empirical object like a desk or a tea cup; it is contained within the skull. This is what I mean by 'is, or can be made to be': it is an empirical object by virtue of being a material thing; but it is not simply experienced as such under normal circumstances.

that is the source of consciousness, but this 'property' is unknowable; and, in this sense, for McGinn, knowledge has limits. If the mind were an empirical object, McGinn contends, then the problem in principle could be solved. There is a brain property that governs the data received from the five senses, but this cognitive faculty is incapable of divining the connection between the mind and the brain. Likewise, if the faculty of introspection could be used to determine the mind's outer relations, rather than only its inner conditions (as it seems to be the case), then the problem in principle could be solved. Hence, for McGinn, if either empirical analysis could do what it cannot do, or if introspection could do what it cannot do, then the problem in principle could be solved.

[W]e need an additional faculty if we are going to understand the mind-brain link. The faculties we have provide us with both terms of the mind-brain relation, but they do not give us what binds the two terms together. Hence my contention that no matter how much we learn about the brain, we will *never* be able to forge an explanatory *link* to consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

Short of 'an additional faculty', however, the reality of conscious mind, for McGinn, appears to be a mystery. The perennial 'mind-body' problem, then, is not a problem at all, for McGinn; it is a mystery. Thus, for him, the profound dismay that the one interlocutor expresses in the above story, is a philosophically important dismay, namely that conscious meat is incoherent, but it *is*, and this, for him, is an unavoidable mystery.

## *2.2. Mystery of Matter*

What is referred to by the notion/term matter (or 'meat', as the above parable would have it)? What follows is a brief survey of one aspect of quantum physics which has engendered the view, for some, that matter is mysterious, namely quantum measurement.

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<sup>3</sup> McGinn, op cit., 52. Italics mine.

### *2.2.1. Macro-Measurement*

Contemporary science inherited the notion that material objects are composed of very tiny atoms, small bits of matter known as particles. This view was, for Newton, paradigmatic. He himself speaks of it in this way:

It seems possible to me that God in the beginning formed matter in solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moving particles, of such sizes and figures, and with such properties, and in such proportion in space, as most conduced to the end for which he formed them.<sup>4</sup>

But this paradigm proved to be insufficient for the quest of contemporary science to understand what the sub-atomic particles are.

### *2.2.2. Micro-Measurement*

Heisenberg's work with Bohr led him slowly to a very important distinction regarding the electron data that he was attempting to evaluate. The data, Heisenberg observed, was evidence of the electron's *final location*, which revealed nothing of the actuality of intermediate trajectories. Thus, Heisenberg could determine empirically that the electron is actual at the point of departure from the electron gun and at the final location on the screen; but in the interim stage, he determined, the electron no longer exists as a certain actual entity. This interim stage came to be referred to as a '*field of potentialities*.'

Heisenberg was able, furthermore, to determine that unless there is some sort of interference (something external that interacts with the field), then it remains a field of potentialities. In this state, then, what is called an 'electron' does not exist as an actual entity, it is simply a set of ontological potentialities: it could become a dot here or there on the screen, but it is nowhere right now. One such source of interference could be a physicist's act of measurement.

Measurement in the Newtonian sense was understood to be an experimental task which conveys purely phenomenal data about the thing or

things being measured. Quantum measurement, however, according to Heisenberg's position, creates the phenomenon. Shimon Malin puts it like this:

There is a profound difference between ordinary measurements and quantum measurements. In ordinary life, and in classical physics, a measurement gives information about the state of the measured system, a state that is not significantly affected by the measurement process. In quantum physics, however, *measurements are creative*. They literally create the electron as an actual thing, where, before the measurement, no thing existed.<sup>5</sup>

An interesting paradigm shift has occurred with quantum measurement. And one of the most interesting aspects of this shift is what Malin speaks of here as the *creative effect of physical measurement*. Packaged in this new understanding of measurement is also a new understanding of matter, and of the two modes of being that matter seems capable of attaining in a scientifically verifiable sense: the potential and the actual.

Heisenberg describes this act of measurement as follows:

Now the theoretical interpretation of an experiment starts with the two steps that have been discussed. In the first step, we have to describe the arrangement of the experiment, eventually combined with a first observation, in terms of classical physics and translate this description into a probability function. This probability function follows the laws of quantum theory, and its change in the course of time, which is continuous, can be calculated from the initial conditions; this is the second step. The probability function combines objective and subjective elements. It contains statements about possibilities or better tendencies ("potentia" in Aristotelian philosophy), and these statements are completely objective, they do not depend on any observer; and it contains statements about our knowledge of the system, which of course are subjective in so far as they

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<sup>4</sup> Issac Newton quoted in Shimon Malin "Waves of Nothingness" in *Nature Loves to Hide: Quantum Physics and the Nature of Reality, a Western Perspective* (New York: Oxford, 2001), 13-14 and 47.

<sup>5</sup> Malin, op cit., 49.

might be different for different observers. In ideal cases the subjective element in the probability function may be practically negligible as compared with the objective one. The physicists then speak of a "pure case."<sup>6</sup>

There is an inaccessible aspect to the measurement process, for Heisenberg. The element that is inaccessible is an element of matter itself. Matter, therefore, imposes a limit on our understanding of itself, and quantum measurement, therefore, discloses a certain epistemic closure that is due to the nature of matter. The 'collapse of the quantum states' is the process of actualization: the action by which the external interference of a scientist's measuring apparatus *creates* the entity being measured. This process seems to have three different stages (from 'set of potentialities', to 'specific potentiality', to 'actual elementary quantum event' – each of which occurs as a 'choice') and is atemporal.<sup>7</sup> It is this process that Shimon Malin refers to when he says "the mystery. . . is the process."<sup>8</sup>

### *2.3. Mystery of Language*

What is referred to by the notion/term 'language'? Heidegger's lecture "Language" begins with a few thoughts on the way that the act of communication assumes the medium of language:

Man speaks. We speak when we are awake and we speak in our dreams. We are always speaking, even when we do not utter a single word aloud, but merely listen or read, and even when we are not particularly listening or speaking but are attending to some work or taking a rest. We are continually speaking in one way or another. We speak because speaking is natural to us. It does not first arise out of some special volition. Man is said to have language by nature. It is held that man, in distinction from plant and animal, is the living being capable of speech. . . only speech enables man to be the living being that he is as man.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Werner Heisenberg *Physics and Philosophy* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1999), 52-53. Malin quotes a portion of this passage, op cit., 50.

<sup>7</sup> cf. Malin op cit., "In and Out of Space and Time", 111-24, esp. 113-4.

<sup>8</sup> Malin, op cit., 87.

<sup>9</sup> Martin Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), 189. <sup>10</sup>

Is speech really *the* distinguishing characteristic of man? What Heidegger seems to be saying here is that language is incessantly used by man, but it is not simply a tool that he uses to achieve some end. Man speaks because he is a linguistic being: he speaks because that is what it is to be human. Speech seems, for Heidegger, to be *the* essential, rather than *an* accidental quality. Furthermore, for Heidegger, language is not the sort of thing that we can observe from the outside. Man uses (or better, man is used by language), studies or theorizes about it as an *incessant* patron of it, rather than as its proprietor. It is, for Heidegger, a faculty that, once developed, is ever-present in a way that defines what it is to be human. Man is a language-speech laden creature, in a language-speech laden world. Man, for Heidegger, is linguistic; he indwells language.

In the first lecture of the three lectures which he titles "The Nature of Language," Heidegger makes this point a bit differently. The manner in which man is linguistic is not a matter that is for discursive analysis alone: language is experienced non-discursively as well.

To undergo an experience with something -be it a thing, a person, or a god- means that this something befalls us, strikes us, comes over us, overwhelms and transforms us. When we talk of "undergoing" an experience, we mean specifically that the experience is not of our own making; to undergo here means that we endure it, suffer it, receive it as it strikes us and submit to it. . . If it is true that man finds the proper abode of his existence in language...then an experience we undergo with language will touch the innermost nexus of our existence. . . [O]ur relation to language is vague, obscure, almost speechless.<sup>10</sup>

For Heidegger, an important aspect of language is that we inextricably experience it. The manner of this experience is such that through it one understands language to be 'vague, obscure, almost speechless.' This sort of experience one might also (at least at certain times), call a 'poetic experience'. Heidegger himself seems to suggest something similar:



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What is it that the poet reaches? It is not mere knowledge. He obtains entrance into the relation of word to thing. This relation is not, however, a connection between the thing that is on one side and the word that is on the other. The word itself is the relation which in each instance retains the thing within itself in such a manner that it "is" a thing.<sup>11</sup>

This 'experience', for Heidegger, is of the relational nature of language: (it might even be said that it is the relation). Speech is man's way of experiencing and expressing his relational being. One assumes that it is such an experience that would lead to Heidegger's statement: '*language itself is language.*'

He continues as follows:

The understanding that is schooled in logic, in thinking of every thing in terms of calculation and hence usually overbearing, calls this proposition an empty tautology... We do not wish to get anywhere. We would like only, for once, to get to just where we are already.<sup>12</sup>

Language is where we are, for Heidegger; we participate in it, we do not merely meet it as a difficulty or a puzzle. But in an unlikely manner, the nature of *being* for man is closely aligned with the *nature* of language. Both matter and mind are common aspects of *being in general*. Language, however, for Heidegger, is a definitive aspect of the being of man. It is not something which we simply define, but something which also defines us. Thus, handling it improperly might not be evidence merely of an intellectual danger, but of an existential danger as well. For to deal with language improperly, for Heidegger, might well be to deal with human nature improperly as well.

To Heidegger, then, language is to be treated with humility and respect. He speaks of the reality of language in an intellectually cautious manner:

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<sup>11</sup> Heidegger, op cit., 66.

<sup>12</sup> Heidegger *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 190.

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We do not wish to assault language in order to force it into the grip of ideas already fixed beforehand. We do not wish to reduce the nature of language to a concept, so that this concept may provide a generally useful view of language that will lay to rest all further notions about it.<sup>13</sup>

A mathematical approach to studying language, to establishing language on a logically complete and sound basis, for example, might well engage language in such an assaulting, forceful and reductive manner.

In "Language," Heidegger makes an interesting appeal to St. John's Gospel that touches this matter well:

According to the opening of the Prologue of the Gospel of St. John, in the beginning the Word was with God. The attempt is made not only to free the question of origin from the fetters of a rational-logical explanation, but also to set aside the limits of a merely logical description of language.<sup>14</sup>

This 'attempt' which St John makes in his Gospel is one with which Heidegger is sympathetic. For him, 'a merely logical description of language' will not suffice. If 'a merely logical description of language' will not suffice, then language, though rational and logical, is, for Heidegger, something of a mystery it would seem.

#### *3. Being-as-Ikon*

In the first chapter, we noted a close relation between knowing and being, namely that Denys' notion of knowledge is *of* beings and *in* beings and 'has its limit in beings'. Furthermore, it was noted that a response to the question 'What is knowledge?' must treat the nature of being-as-ikon. In relation to his 'Sun analogy', it was noted that this treatment entails, for Denys, a process of 'receiving the world as gift and ikon, and relating it back to Him'.<sup>15</sup> '[A]ll things',

<sup>13</sup> Heidegger, *op cit.*, 190. Italics mine.

<sup>14</sup> Heidegger, *op cit.*, 192-3.

<sup>15</sup> Marion *The Idol and the Distance* (Fordham, New York: 2001), 178. Quote from *DN*, IV, 4, 697 b-c. Marion's rendering of the Greek *αἰτία* with the French *Requisit*, which Carlson maintains as *Requisite*, insightfully captures Denys' notion that being having come from this

for Denys, 'whatever is and whatever becomes, is and becomes through the Beautiful and the Good. All things look to it, and are moved and maintained by it. . .all beings (*τὰ ὄντα*) are from the Beautiful and the Good. . .Therefore all things are aiming for, desiring and loving the Beautiful and the Good' (*DN IV*, 705D-708A). Being, for Denys, then, as we noted, is inherently relational because it is from the Beautiful and the Good, and aims for, desires and loves the Beautiful and the Good. Thus, each instance of being as an ikon confronts us, according to Denys, such that to know it properly is to know it in relation to its Cause. And, therefore, it follows from this conception of being, as we noted, that knowledge, according to Denys, is being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being in communion (i.e., participation) with being-as-ikon-of-beyond-being. This process of participation I have called the process of relational beauty, which implies a Dionysian epistemology of beauty that defines 'to know' in terms of 'ikon' and 'participation'. I argued that being a 'knowing-being-as-ikon', seems to mean that I participate with the Beauty of the beyond-being by means of the beauty of the known-being-as-ikon. Furthermore, knowledge conceived of as such implies a hierarchical conception, namely that every ikon (rational or empirical) participates 'according to its capacity' in the process of relational beauty. Discerning these empirical and rational ikons as the manifold immanence of the unified transcendent seems to be, for Denys, the focus of the knowledge process, namely to participate with the manifold manifestation of the beyond-being in/through the differential ikonic nature of being.

What does this mean in relation to these mysteries of 'mind' 'matter' and 'language'?

If being is conceived of as hierarchically ikonic in a manifold manner (which would include dissimilarities), and if knowledge is a process of participation of a certain beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being with some other beautiful-being(s)-as-ikon(s)-of-the-beyond-being, both of which manifest the beyond-being in accordance with their 'capacity', then these positions could

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Cause requires it for the purpose of returning to it (cf. Carlson's note 21, 151). Marion's notion of

be conceived of as manifesting, by means of the process of relational beauty, the mystery of the beyond-being as known in the beautiful-being-(of-matter, -mind, -language)-as-ikon-of-the beyond-being. Denys' position, in my opinion, provides a context that suggests that these mysteries of being, if they can be conceived of in terms of being-as-ikon, could be conceived of as being univocal when they are, at face value, in fact quite different. But how do we get from these mysteries of being to the mystery of being-as-ikon? Let's look at this particular issue a bit more closely.

*3.1. The Mystery of Being qua the Mystery of Being-as-ikon*

Each of these positions expresses and maintains a specific position regarding the nature of being, which I take to be a common element of these mysteries that suggests, therefore, a certain commonality between them, i.e. the mystery of being.

McGinn's contention, for example, that the 'mind-body' problem is not a problem, but a mystery, addresses, for him, the ambiguity of the mind-body relation, and it does so in a way that affirms that there is an aspect of the mind that is simply unknowable. His position, therefore, suggests the mystery of the being of mind, fundamentally, and of the mind-body relation, as well.

Furthermore, Malin's interpretation of Heisenberg which results in his conclusion that the process of quantum measurement is a mystery of the being of matter. This is because the indeterminability of the position of a particle when it becomes a 'field of potentialities' expresses a position that, for him, describes the fundamental nature of matter. That is, the mystery of quantum measurement, for Malin, uncovers a fundamental mystery of matter itself. Thus, the scientific effort to know matter experimentally, at least at the quantum level, affirms, for him, that it is a mysterious process because a 'field of potentialities', apart from measurement or some other form of interference, is unknowable.

The position that the being of language, because of its relational nature with the being of man, resists a 'merely logical description' implies, for

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distance remains by his own admission necessarily undefined.

Heidegger, that language is experienced in a 'vague, obscure, almost speechless manner', and expresses a position that language as such is, therefore, in some sense an unknowable mystery.

The mystery of the being of mind, the mystery of the being of matter and the mystery of the being of language, thus, each expresses a specific aspect of the mystery of being. Furthermore, each of these cases appeals to the mystery of being in a way that suggests unknowability, i.e. in a way that intends to describe, in a specific sense, the way that being is, and the way, thus, that being can (or cannot) be known.

If each of these positions does indeed reveal in some sense the mystery of being, and, thus, in some sense, being's unknowability, then it would seem to be the case that such mysteries are related at least insofar as they each concern the nature of being. Furthermore, if being is taken in terms of being-as-ikon, then each respective mystery of being is thereby related to the others in the context of the process of relational beauty. The notion of being-as-ikon, as such, provides a context within which these mysteries of being can be understood in a univocal sense. These mysteries of being, therefore, as I see it, are amenable to a single approach, i.e. to being interpreted in terms of being-as-ikon, because, fundamentally, they each seem to exhibit something of the mystery of being, and of its unknowability.

I take the 'mystery of being', and thus, the notion of being's unknowability, then, to be fundamental to my suggesting an approach to these positions in terms of Dionysian thought which maintains that being has an ikonic nature. For me, each of these positions is persuasive to some extent. My interest here is in suggesting an approach that respects and maintains the value of these positions with regard to their describing in some sense the mystery of being, while ultimately diverging from them in terms of incorporating the notion of beyond-being as an integral aspect of the mystery of being through the notion of the mystery of being-as-ikon. Thus, while, for example, I find McGinn's treatment of the mystery of mind to be persuasive, I do not find his materialistic conclusions to

be acceptable in the same way that he seems to. I am able, however, through the notion of being-as-ikon to redefine the notion of mind in terms of mind-as-being-ikon, and therefore, to part company with him regarding his materialism. For mind-as-being-as-ikon, from a Dionysian perspective, while being a mystery of being, as it were, is not solely a mystery of being, but is also a mystery of the beyond-being as well. The mystery of matter and language, respectively, I take in a similar manner, namely by taking these mysteries of being to be likewise suggestive of the plausibility of the notion of being-as-ikon because they seem to reveal, in some sense, the nature of being as mystery. Such an approach seems to me to be warranted for the following line of reasoning.

If being is in some sense mysterious, then this would seem to imply that the notion of being-as-ikon is plausible. I suggest, with these three mysteries, that being is in some sense mysterious. Therefore, the notion of being-as-ikon seems to be plausible.

Put differently: If being is not mysterious in some sense, then there would seem to be no support for Denys' notion of being-as-ikon. If it can be determined that being is indeed mysterious (i.e. *not* not mysterious), at least in some sense, then it is plausible to assume that being is ikonic, which would thereby provide an explanatory context for the mystery of being.

Either way, i.e. either positively or negatively presented, the mystery of being seems to lend credence to the notion of being-as-ikon because if being is indeed ikonic, then one would expect, at the very least, to find that being is indeed mysterious, at least in some sense. Hence, because I find that being is indeed mysterious, at least as regards 'mind', 'matter' and 'language', I therefore find Denys' particular notion of being, i.e. being-as-ikon, able to affirm these various mysteries of being in a univocal sense.

#### *4. Conclusion*

Mystery of being does not necessarily imply metaphysical mystery; nor do various mysteries of being, such as the ones that I have suggested here, necessarily imply some univocal sense of mystery. Thus, although there might be

a mystery associated with the nature of 'mind', 'matter' and 'language', respectively, this would not seem to imply anything specifically about the nature of mystery. But, from a Dionysian perspective, given the notion of being-as-ikon, mystery of being does necessarily imply metaphysical mystery, and so does necessarily imply a univocal sense of mystery. This is the case because, for Denys, ikon is both the mystery of being, by nature, and the mystery of beyond-being, by manifestation, and so to know being by nature is to know beyond-being by manifestation. For Denys, the mystery of the beyond-being is, nevertheless, anterior to the mystery of being, and so, his position recognizes the univocal nature of the mystery of the beyond-being in being even before it discerns the manifold manifestations of mystery in being.

#### *4.1. Final Thoughts*

In some ways, this may seem like an easy way of importing Christian thought into philosophical dialogue. But for one whose *Weltanschauung*, like Denys', is characterized by a cosmic vision of procession and return, it would be simply a logical (or more properly a *hyper*-logical) way of viewing such claims. Furthermore, my usage of Denys' thought, while it does indeed import a Christocentric perspective, because his version of procession and return, as opposed to that of the neo-Platonists, Proklos for example, is Christologically conceived, offers a kind of *apologia* for Dionysian thought because his thought is generally (though inaccurately in my opinion) thought of in terms of *apophasis* alone. My attempt to bring his thought into philosophical discussions does not deny his interest in apophaticism, but here I have shown that his emphasis on kataphaticism can be applied beneficially to discussions that affirmatively maintain a sense of the mystery of being, i.e. the mystery of being is affirmed in the mystery of being-as-ikon. Thus, while what I have done here is primarily a kind of kataphatic defense of Denys' notion of being-as-ikon, the following chapters offer an apophatic defense of this notion.

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The line of reasoning that I have offered here concerning the mystery of being and the interpretive context of the mystery of being-as-ikon also provides, in my opinion, a way of responding to the problems of the relationship between theistic proof and theology, the relationship between science and theology and the relationship between language and theology. These issues I shall treat in turn, beginning with an examination of Descartes' 'ontological argument' in the chapter immediately following, and the final two chapters will treat, respectively, beauty in science and silence as a defining element of language and linguistic meaning. Let us, now, turn to a treatment of the first of these issues.



*'Mathematical Truths' and the 'Existence' of 'God' in Descartes' 'Ontological' Argument: In Defense of Denys' Notion of Rational-Ikon*

*1. Introduction*

Descartes' program of methodological doubt leads him to "innumerable ideas of certain things which,...have their own true and immutable natures."<sup>1</sup> Such ideas he specifies in the Fifth Meditation as being, first, 'figures, numbers, arithmetic, geometry and pure mathematics.'<sup>2</sup> These 'ideas', he maintains, are "the most certain ones of all."<sup>3</sup> What, then, is the role of such 'mathematical truths' in the 'ontological' argument of the Fifth Meditation? My response to this question refers us to Dionysian thought. The outcome of the chapter, then, is twofold. First of all, it defends Denys' notion of rational-ikon from an apophatic perspective. Secondly, from this Dionysian perspective, it defends the 'ontological' argument' of the Fifth Meditation.

*1.1. Structure of the Chapter*

The chapter is structured as follows. The next section is an examination of the Fifth Meditation. The third section presents the argument in three different formulations and an analysis of the usage of 'existence' in the second premise of the argument. The final section addresses the charge of 'circularity', and, drawing from Denys' notion of being-as-ikon, offers an apophatic interpretation of Descartes' reasoning in the Fifth Meditation, which I suggest, creates a larger context within which to view the 'ontological' argument, one which allows for 'certainty' to be conceived of as a kind of 'unknowing'.

*1.2. Overview of My Argument*

I argue that Descartes' usage of 'mathematical truths' requires that 'God' be conceived of as an abstract entity because they form, I argue, the paradigm for Descartes' 'clear and distinct ideas', and, thus, 'certainty' in the Fifth Meditation. It is not my intent, however, to argue that, *for Descartes*, 'God' exists as

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<sup>1</sup> Descartes, *op cit.*, 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

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'mathematical truths' exist. I acknowledge that *for Descartes*, 'God' exists in some higher manner, as it were, which is what his 'ontological' argument intends to show. However, I argue that the argument does not achieve *this* goal; it fails on account of what I call the 'abstract' nature of 'mathematical truth', which is, as I just stated, the paradigm for 'clear and distinct ideas' and 'certainty', and, thus, the only paradigm offered in the Fifth Meditation for how to understand the 'certainty of the clear and distinct idea of the existence of God'. According to my reading, however, the 'ontological' argument might be deemed to be sound, nevertheless, if it is granted, as I do for the sake of the discussion, that 'existence' is a 'perfection'. But be this as it may, it might well still be deemed to be unsound because of 'circular' reasoning. In response to this charge, I offer an apophatic interpretation, which, in my view, could relieve it of this criticism.

I turn here to a review of the Fifth Meditation to give the immediate context of Descartes' 'ontological' argument.

## *2. The Meditation*

The Fifth Meditation begins with the stated intent to examine whether or not certain 'ideas' of material things are 'distinct' or 'confused,' an intent which is more basic than an investigation into the notion of certainty as regards 'material things' alone.

### *2.1. 'Material things' and 'Clear and Distinct Ideas'*

[A]nd nothing seems to be more urgent now. . . than that I might try to emerge from the doubts into which I have gone in the previous days and that I might see whether something certain concerning material things could be had. And before I shall inquire as to whether any such things would exist outside of me, I must surely consider the ideas of these things, in so far as they are in my cogitation, and

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see which of these ideas would be distinct and which of them would be confused.<sup>4</sup>

The question of the possibility of rational certainty precedes the question of the possibility of empirical certainty because that which is outside of 'me' physically, for Descartes, is of secondary epistemological importance to that which is 'in my cogitation.'

What is certainty for Descartes? His is a concern with a notion of certainty that is *a priori*. The Meditation, however, begins to take flight in the third paragraph by means of referring to the empirical phenomenon of the 'continuous quantity' in terms of 'extension in length, breadth and depth.' Why is this? It is because the *ideas* of these things are either, for Descartes, 'distinct' or 'confused'. The notion of physical extension, for example, gives way, for Descartes, to a perception of the *a priori* truth value of 'figures and number'.

And what I think is maximally to be considered here is that I find within me innumerable ideas of certain things which, even if they would perhaps exist nowhere outside of me, still cannot be said to be nothing. And, although they would in a certain manner be cogitated by me at will, they are not feigned by me, but rather do they have their own true and immutable natures. So that, when I imagine a triangle, for example, even if such a figure would perhaps exist nowhere in the world outside my cogitation – nor would it have ever existed –, there still is, in fact, a certain determinate nature or essence or form of it,

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<sup>4</sup> Descartes, *op cit.*, 64. cf. Heisenberg "Development of Philosophical Ideas Since Descartes in Comparison with the New Situation in Quantum Theory" in *Physics and Philosophy* (Prometheus: 1999), 76-92. Here Heisenberg argues that Descartes' distinction between 'res cogitans' and 'res extensa,' the latter of which having become the primary focus of modern science, is indefensible according to the contemporary developments in quantum theory which show that nature and mind are connected in the work of natural science in such a way that the one cannot be removed from the other except on pain of incoherence. Descartes' position, of which this chapter endeavors to examine only a very small portion, seems to pose a formidable epistemological problem which results from this view of reality, a problem which was addressed by the bent toward the empirical in Locke, Berkley, Hume, Kant and contemporary forms of analytic thought, particularly by the bent toward mathematical logic as evidenced in logical positivism.

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immutable and eternal, which has not been feigned by me, nor does it depend on my mind: as is obvious from thence that various properties could be demonstrated about this triangle, namely, that its three angles be equal to two right ones, that the maximum side be opposite to its maximum angle, and similar things, which properties – whether I would want to or not want to – I now clearly recognize, even if I previously would in no way have then cogitated about them when I have imagined the triangle, nor would they therefore have been feigned by me.<sup>5</sup>

The paradigm of certainty arising from that which is outside of 'me' concerns the 'clear and distinct ideas' of the 'mathematical truths' which "have their own true and immutable natures." Independent of empirical reality and even of one's cognitive abilities, the 'mathematical truths' turn out to have "a certain determinate nature or essence or form" which is "immutable and eternal." No amount of empirical awareness or rational reflection is required for the nature and attributes of a triangle, e.g., to be precisely what they are; nor is any perception or discernment effective to the end of changing the nature and/or attributes of a triangle. This then, as I see it, is the paradigm for the notion of 'clear and distinct ideas': the immutability and eternality of the 'mathematical truths'. Therefore, Descartes' aim in offering an 'ontological' proof of the 'existence' of 'God', in my opinion, must be viewed from the vantage point of the 'mathematical truths' as, for him, being paradigmatic of what certainty is.<sup>6</sup>

In the following section, Descartes seems to be suggesting that the *a priori* 'mathematical truths', having been drawn from 'cogitation', act as the means by

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<sup>5</sup> Descartes, op cit., 65.

<sup>6</sup> For a contrary view see D. E. Flage and C. A. Bonnen "Meditation Five: The Beginning of Descent" in their *Descartes and Method* (Routledge: 1999). The argument suggests a consistency throughout the *Meditations* and particularly between Meditation 5 and Meditations 3 and 4. As a result the 'ontological' argument of Meditation 5 is viewed as an "interlude" in a reflection on geometry. Descartes' "true and immutable natures" are spoken of in what seems to be Whiteheadian terminology as "ideas in the mind of God," thus suggesting a crucial element for how the consistency of this position is to be established.

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which whatsoever is properly related to them in terms of 'cogitation' bears the same sense of immutability and eternity, by virtue of this relation.

But now, if from thence alone that I could draw the idea of something from my cogitation, it follows that all the things that I clearly and distinctly perceive to pertain to that thing do really and truly pertain to it, then cannot therefrom also an argument be had by which the existence of God might be proved?<sup>7</sup>

By means of the certainty of 'mathematical truths', Descartes seems to argue, it would seem possible that a proof for the 'existence' of 'God' could be formulated. Or, to put this same point a bit differently: if the idea of 'God' is distinct in the way that 'mathematical truths' are distinct, not to say in an identical manner, then a proof for the 'existence' of 'God' could be constructed. The 'idea' of 'God', however, (it would seem) would not be properly 'clear and distinct' but derivatively so.

The 'truths of mathematics' have been found by way of reflection on the notion of material extension, and the truth of these ideas are deemed to be 'the most certain ones of all.' The notion of 'clear and distinct ideas' as related to 'God' is presented in terms of the 'clear and distinct ideas' of 'mathematical truths'. The notion of 'clear and distinct ideas' seems, therefore, to be delineated solely in terms of 'mathematical truths.' Thus, when he makes use of this concept in terms of his 'ontological' argument, the reader, it seems, only has this context within which to understand him.

*2.2. 'Clear and Distinct Ideas' and the 'Ontological' Proof*

His initial stated aim is to 'consider the ideas of material things' for the purpose of determining the clear and distinct ideas which are related to them. The Meditation now proceeds by introducing the notion of 'God', i.e. 'a most highly perfect being,' and with Descartes proclaiming that he 'clearly and distinctly'

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<sup>7</sup> Descartes, op cit., 66.

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understands 'that it pertains to his nature that he always exist'. These assertions form the two premises of his 'ontological' argument. Thus, the Meditation now turns from a consideration of the question of 'clear and distinct ideas' of material things to the question of the 'clear and distinct (non-empirical) idea' of 'God.'

I certainly find within me the idea of God, namely, the idea of a most highly perfect being, no less than I do the idea of some figure or number. Nor do I understand less clearly and distinctly that it pertains to his nature that he always exist than that which I demonstrate of some figure or number also pertains to the nature of this figure or number. And, therefore, even if not all the things on which I have meditated in these previous days would be true, the existence of God must be within my reach at a minimum in the same grade of certainty in which mathematical truths have hitherto been.<sup>8</sup>

Disregarding for the moment the notion of 'existence', the idea of 'God' seems to be presented here as just one more abstract entity like that of a triangle. If this is the case, then the subject 'God' in this passage would seem to be commutable with the subject 'triangle' in the above quoted section. Descartes seems to make this move in his reply to Caterus. But I shall treat this issue in the following section.

But these ideas seem to be conceived of differently in at least one respect, namely that 'mathematical truths' are presented as being *prima facie* certain, which, apparently, require no proof of the sort that the idea 'God' requires. Brief reflection on the nature of material extension has provided the certainty of the ideas of mathematics. The idea of 'God' apparently needs more; thus he provides a proof for this idea, namely that the idea 'God' exists, or that existence pertains

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<sup>8</sup> Descartes, op cit., 66. cf. Anselm *Proslogium*, chs. 2-3; and J-L Marion "Is the Argument Ontological? The Anselmian Proof and the Two Demonstrations of the Existence of God in the *Meditations*" in *Cartesian Questions* (Chicago: 1999), 139-160 and concerning his notion of 'onto-theo-logy' which is crucial for his treatment of the ontological argument, see "Onto-theo-logy" in *On Descartes' Metaphysical Prism* (Chicago: 1999), 67-127.

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to the nature of 'God.' The proof is necessary because of the notion of existence that pertains to 'God'. But Descartes 'clearly and distinctly' perceives the idea 'God' and he 'clearly and distinctly' perceives that existence pertains to this idea ('God'). So what is going on here?

Why do we need a proof for the 'existence' of 'God'?

The certainty of the 'existence' of 'God', it seems, is not *prima facie*, as with, e.g., the angles of a triangle equaling  $180^\circ$ . How, then, is certainty achievable concerning the 'existence' of 'God'? Descartes establishes that the idea of 'God' is cogitated like the ideas of 'mathematical truths,' namely that it is 'clear and distinct.' His reasoning seems to be that if the 'clear and distinct idea' of 'God' is 'clear and distinct' in the way that the ideas of 'mathematical truths' are 'clear and distinct', then the 'clear and distinct idea' of the 'existence of God' is certain. Hence the 'ontological' proof rests, it would seem, on a notion of abstract likeness: 'God' is like 'mathematical truths', it would seem, according to Descartes' reasoning, in that it is a 'clear and distinct idea.' 'Existence' pertains to the 'clear and distinct idea' of 'God' as 'the maximum side of a triangle is opposite to its maximum angle.' But with the 'ontological' proof, the 'clear and distinct idea' of 'God' as 'a most highly perfect being' is distinguished by means of the derivation of 'existence'.

But how has Descartes offered a proof of the 'existence' of 'God'?

The proof treats the idea of 'God' as a most highly perfect being. The notion of a 'most highly perfect being' distinguishes 'God', for Descartes, from 'mathematical truths'. It would seem that, *for Descartes*, 'God' is, therefore, not pure idea, as with the abstract nature of 'mathematical truths', but that it has a determinant existential nature. But the actualization of this existential nature, however, is in no way guaranteed by establishing only that the idea of 'God' is 'clear and distinct', namely that it exists in the mind in the same manner that the 'mathematical truths' exist in the mind. If this is all that is meant by 'existence',

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then 'God' is not reified in any sense external to the reality of mind, and it 'exists' only in the mind, i.e. its existential nature, then, *is* simply conceptual. A triangle, too, might never 'exist' objectively outside of the mind, but this is because there is nothing in the notion of triangle that suggests that it need ever be actual in any objective sense. 'Triangle' is free of the notion of 'existence' except that it is found to 'exist' in the mind. However, Descartes means to accomplish more than this when he aims to prove the 'existence' of 'God', i.e. the 'existence' of 'a most highly perfect being.'

*2.4. Descartes' Defense: Inseparability*

Central to the success of his proof, as he views it, then, is the inseparability of the 'essence' and 'existence' of 'God'.

For, since I be accustomed to distinguish the existence from the essence in all other things, I easily persuade myself that the existence can also be separated from the essence of God, and hence that God can be cogitated as not existing. But to one who is paying attention more diligently it still becomes manifest that the existence can no more be separated from the essence of God *than it can be separated from the essence of a triangle that the magnitude of its three angles is equal to two right ones*, or than the idea of a valley can be separated from the idea of a mountain –so much so that it would be just as contradictory to cogitate God (that is, a most highly perfect being) in whom existence would be lacking (that is, in whom a perfection would be lacking) as to cogitate a mountain from which a valley would be missing.<sup>9</sup>

It would be purely nonsensical to speak of a triangle which has only two angles, or of a mountain which is valley-less. This seems to be commonsense. But it does not seem to be commonsense that the 'essence' and 'existence' of 'God' would be inseparable in the idea of 'God'. This might not seem to be commonsense because

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<sup>9</sup> Descartes, op cit., 66. Italics mine.



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it requires that one assume that 'existence' is a 'perfection',<sup>10</sup> which Descartes does, i.e. an attribute of 'God' as the sum of a triangles' angles equaling 180° is an attribute of a triangle. The idea of a triangle contains certain other ideas which are inseparable from the idea itself, none of which however is the idea of 'existence'. The essential attributes of a triangle are contained within the idea 'triangle.' Contained in the idea 'God' is the notion of 'existence' because it is an idea of 'a most highly perfect being', a being which could not fail to be less than maximally perfect regarding all of its attributes. In each instance, however, save that of 'God', the 'existence' of a thing is distinct from the 'essence' of the thing: the mere thinking of a thing in no way determines or effects the 'existence' of the thing, except in the case of the idea 'God.' It cannot fail to be contradictory, for Descartes, to separate the idea 'triangle' from its contained attributes, nor likewise can it fail to be contradictory to separate the idea 'God' from its contained attributes. Thus, for Descartes, if the attribute 'existence' is contained in the idea 'God', then it would be inconsistent to affirm the idea but exclude one of the ideas' defining characteristics.

Descartes, then offers his 'ontological' proof as he does because he assumes that 'existence' is a 'perfection' which 'a most highly perfect' being would not be lacking.

*2.4. Descartes' Defense: Necessity*

But, he recognizes that there seems to be a problem with 'thinking' being the stimulus for 'God's' existence:

Granted, however, that I could not cogitate God except as existing, just as from thence that I could not cogitate a mountain without a valley: yet, just as from

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<sup>10</sup> cf. Immanuel Kant *Critique of Pure Reason* Pt.2.2, bk.2.3.4 [incidentally T. W. Adorno suggests that this is a central passage to the whole *Critique* in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Polity: Bonn, 2001), 41-2)]; Norman Malcolm "Anselm's Ontological Arguments" in *Knowledge and Certainty: Essays and Lectures* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963); A. Plantinga's *The Ontological Argument*; G. Dicker "Meditation V: The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God" in Descartes: *An Analytical and Historical Introduction* (Oxford: 1993). Note 6 also.

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thence that I would cogitate a mountain with a valley, it certainly does not follow that there is any mountain in the world, so also from thence that I would cogitate God as existing, it does not seem therefore to follow that God exists. For my cogitation imposes no necessity on the things. And just as it is permitted to imagine a winged horse, even if no horse would have wings, so also can I perhaps feign existence of God, although no God would exist.<sup>11</sup>

The thinking of a mountain does not require its 'existence' in the world, nor would the thinking of 'God' require that 'God' 'exists' (noticeably absent here in Descartes' Meditation is the prepositional phrase 'in the world' with regard to the manner in which 'existence' might be assumed to be required by the thinking of 'God'. Thus, I take it that he does not mean to imply that 'God' 'exists' in the world<sup>12</sup>). Apart from this point it seems nevertheless to be the case that merely thinking of an idea is not grounds for assuming its objective 'existence' as an externally real entity outside of the mind. This seems to be acceptable as regards mountains and triangles because they are ideas which are essentially devoid of the attribute of 'existence' (except that they exist in the mind in so far as they are cogitated). Mountains and triangles are ideas that might as it happens be represented by things which actually do 'exist' in the world; but they could be ideas as they are without ever becoming actual in terms of 'existence' outside of the mind. The subject 'mountain' in no way contains the attribute of 'existence' (in the world) because there is no necessity in the thing itself which determines the specific cogitation of mountain as being an idea that necessarily exists. The fact that a mountain 'exists' (in the world) is an accidental rather than an essential

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<sup>11</sup> Descartes, op cit., 66-7.

<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, Descartes does not hold that triangles could ever be empirical data: "I do not agree that these [geometrical figures] have ever fallen under our senses, as everyone normally believes, because though there is no doubt that there could be in the world figures such as the geometers consider, I deny that there are any around us, unless perhaps they be so small that they make no impression on our sense; because they are for the most part made up of straight lines, and I do not think that any part of a line has touched our sense which was strictly straight'. . . (AT VII 381)"; quoted in Kenny, op cit., 179.

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attribute of the idea 'mountain.' One can freely think of such a thing as a Pegasus, a Unicorn or a Satyr completely apart from the question of the 'existence' of such things, except that in so far as they are thought they 'exist' in the mind.

But, for Descartes, the case with the idea of 'God' is different since it does contain the 'perfection' of 'existence'. In so far as the idea 'God' is cogitated, then 'God' necessarily exists outside of the mind: "not that my cogitation would effect this, or that it would impose any necessity on anything, but rather, on the contrary, because the necessity of the thing itself, namely, the existence of God, determines me to cogitate this."<sup>13</sup> The idea 'God' is constrained, as it were, by the necessity of its perfection and so, for Descartes, does not enjoy this freedom from 'existence' as if it were a pure idea of mathematical reflection or the fancy of a fairy tale. Necessity accompanies the idea 'God' in a way unique to itself; none of the other ideas, according to Descartes, implies the objective 'existence' of its subject (but the mathematical ideas are spoken of as being immutable and eternal; surely this implies some notion of existence distinct from the mutable and temporal nature of mind? Indeed, in my view, this does imply such a notion of existence, namely 'abstract existence'). But how exactly are we to conceive of the 'existence' of 'God'?

The persuasive element of Descartes' proof as he says is "solely the things that I clearly and distinctly perceive."<sup>14</sup> What again are these things? As I understand the Meditation, these are initially and fundamentally the 'mathematical truths.' At the outset of the Meditation, it is determined that ideas of 'mathematical truths' are most certain, and then it is determined that 'God' is a 'clear and distinct' idea and that 'existence' 'clearly and distinctly' pertains to it. Yet having now proved the 'existence' of 'God' by this means, it now seems, for Descartes, that the certainty of this idea is more basic than even the certainty of 'mathematical truth.'

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 68

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But, as for what pertains to God, if I were not overwhelmed by prejudices, and if the images of sensible things did not beset my cogitation from every side, I would certainly recognize nothing prior to, or more easily than, him. For what is more overt from out of itself than that the highest being is, or that God –to whose essence alone existence pertains- exists?<sup>15</sup>

The rationally arrived at idea of 'God', if it were not for limitations placed on the mind by the empirical world, would be, for Descartes, the most fundamental and basic of all 'clear and distinct ideas'. And, for Descartes, 'existence', pertains only to this idea. I shall show in the next section that this is not the case if 'mathematical truths', i.e. those truths which Descartes speaks of as being independent of the mind,<sup>16</sup> are conceived of as existing abstractly.

I now intend to present three versions of the 'ontological' argument, and to analyze what it is that Descartes is able to achieve with this appellation of 'existence' to the idea 'God'. The first version is my own formulation. The second was presented by Caterus; and the last was presented by Descartes in response to Caterus. I shall focus my analysis on my own formulation; but my analysis, since it focuses on the notion of 'existence', can be applied to the other two formulations as well. The result of my analysis is that Descartes succeeds only in proving that God exists outside of the mind in an abstract manner.

*3. Three Formulations of the 'Ontological' Proof*

The argument, as I see it, should be formulated as follows:

- (i) The idea of God as a most highly perfect being exists in my mind as does the idea of a figure or a number.
- (ii) I perceive clearly and distinctly that a most highly perfect being always exists as with the demonstration of an attribute of a figure or number.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

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- (iii) Therefore, the existence of God is at least as certain as mathematical truths.<sup>17</sup>

I derive this formulation from the following text:

(i) I certainly find within me the idea of God, namely, the idea of a most highly perfect being, no less than I do the idea of some figure or number. (ii) Nor do I understand less clearly and distinctly that it pertains to his nature that he always exist than that which I demonstrate of some figure or number also pertains to the nature of this figure or number. (iii) And, therefore, even if not all the things on which I have meditated in these previous days would be true, the existence of God must be within my reach at a minimum in the same grade of certainty in which mathematical truths have hitherto been.

But Caterus in his objection presents it this way:

- (i) God is a supremely perfect being.
- (ii) And a supremely perfect being includes existence, for otherwise it would not be a supremely perfect being.
- (iii) Hence he actually exists.

This formulation is drawn from the portion of the text wherein Descartes is defending what he dubs an 'apparent sophism' concerning the notion that the 'essence' of 'God' indeed implies the 'existence' of 'God' (which comes after the above quoted section from which I draw my formulation). In this passage, Descartes seems to be presenting his reasoning for the purpose of defending premise two of my formulation.

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<sup>17</sup> cf. Heffernan's "Introduction" to his translation of *Meditations*, op cit., 5; a presentation similar

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Descartes' reply to Caterus' objection yields another formulation:

My argument however was as follows: 'That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature, or essence, or form of something, can truly be asserted of that thing. But once we have made a sufficiently careful investigation of what God is, we clearly and distinctly understand that existence belongs to his true and immutable nature. Hence we can now truly assert of God that he does exist.'<sup>18</sup>

It was suggested in the previous section (p. 93) that the term 'God' in Descartes' proof would seem to be interchangeable with the term 'triangle.' Such a substitution could work out something like this:

- (i) The idea of a rectilinear figure whose angles' together equal two right angles exists in my mind.<sup>19</sup>
- (ii) I perceive clearly and distinctly that the idea of a triangle always exists.
- (iii) Therefore, the existence of a triangle is certain.<sup>20</sup>

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to Caterus'.

<sup>18</sup> Cottingham's translation of the *Meditations* published with selections from *Objections and Replies* (Cambridge: 1986), 100. There are also other formulations. Of note is Descartes well known *geometrico* proof in *Objections and Replies*, II. Willis Doney argues that this argument is different from that to which it is supposed to correspond in Meditation Five, and to the argument in *Discourse on Method* (AT VI 36). See also Peter Dear "Mersenne's Suggestion: Cartesian Meditation and the Mathematical Model of Knowledge in the Seventeenth Century" in *Descartes and His Contemporaries* (Chicago: 1995), 44-62.

<sup>19</sup> Disregarding the development of non-Euclidean geometries which Descartes at that time would not have known about.

<sup>20</sup> cf. A. Kenny "Descartes' Ontological Argument" in *Descartes' Meditations*, ed. Vera Chappel, where he argues (in the context of a larger argument which suggests that Descartes' principles of the *cogito* and the existence of God cannot both be maintained) in what seems to be an effective manner for the notion of 'existence in thought.' In a contrived reply to a criticism that Hobbes had raised against Descartes concerning the necessity of a triangles' existing somewhere rather than having no existence at all, Kenny presents this line of reasoning which seems to be in keeping with Cartesian thought on the matter: "What exists nowhere, neither in the world, nor in thought, can have no nature, perhaps; but the triangle exists in thought, and has a true and immutable nature which persists whether or not any triangles outside thought exist or cease to be" (179). This argument is revised on 180 to include the givenness of a triangle. On the Descartes-Hobbes dialogue see Tom Sorrel "Hobbes's Objections and Hobbes's System" and Edwin Curley "Hobbes Versus Descartes" in *Descartes and His Contemporaries*, op cit., 83-96 and 97-109, respectively.



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This was suggested to imply that Descartes' reasoning for the 'existence' of 'God' is reliant upon his reasoning concerning ideas such as triangles, not, however, to imply that *for Descartes* 'God', therefore, exists in the same manner as triangles exist.

Interestingly, the passage that has just been quoted from Descartes' 'Reply' to Caterus seems to do just this. Descartes structures this argument from the reasoning that he presents in the fifth paragraph concerning the nature of mathematical ideas:

[5.] (iii) And what I think is maximally to be considered here is that I find within me innumerable ideas of certain things which, even if they would perhaps exist nowhere outside of me, still cannot be said to be nothing. And, although they would in a certain manner be cogitated by me at will, they are not feigned by me, but rather do they have their own true and immutable natures. (i) So that, when I imagine a triangle, for example, even if such a figure would perhaps exist nowhere in the world outside my cogitation – nor would it have ever existed –, there still is, in fact, a certain determinate nature or essence or form of it, immutable and eternal, which has not been feigned by me, nor does it depend on my mind: (ii) as is obvious from thence that various properties could be demonstrated about this triangle, namely, that its three angles be equal to two right ones, that the maximum side be opposite to its maximum angle, and similar things, which properties – whether I would want to or not want to – I now clearly recognize, even if I previously would in no way have then cogitated about them when I have imagined the triangle, nor would they therefore have been feigned by me.

A formulation of which could be:

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- (i) When I imagine a triangle there is a certain determinate nature or essence or form of it, immutable and eternal, which has not been feigned by me (i.e. a 'clear and distinct idea), nor does it depend on my mind.
- (ii) From this idea various properties could be demonstrated about this triangle: its three angles' equal two right ones, the maximum side is opposite to its maximum angle.
- (iii) Hence a triangle is not nothing because it has a true and immutable nature in my mind.

Descartes' argument from the 'Reply' again is:

- (i) That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature, or essence, or form of something, can truly be asserted of that thing.
- (ii) But once we have made a sufficiently careful investigation of what God is, we clearly and distinctly understand that existence belongs to his true and immutable nature.
- (iii) Hence we can now truly assert of God that he does exist.

What I find Descartes doing in his reply is precisely what I have suggested. He replaces the notion of 'triangle' with the notion of 'God'. In my opinion, this formulation seems to suggest that Descartes was unclear as to what he had in fact argued, and it also seems to support my claim that Descartes' 'ontological' proof is conceptually reliant on his notion of 'mathematical truth'.<sup>21</sup> I do not take this to imply, however, that *for Descartes* 'God' and triangles exist in the same manner. But in the following, I shall argue that *Descartes' reasoning* shows does indeed seem to allow only that 'God' 'exists' abstractly because his notion of 'existence'

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<sup>21</sup> cf. W. Doney "Did Caterus Misunderstand Descartes's Ontological Proof?" in *Essays on the Philosophy and Science of Descartes*, ed. Stephen Voss (Oxford: 1993), 75-84; Jean-Robert Armogathe "Caterus' Objections to God" in *Descartes and His Contemporaries*, op cit., 34-43.



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is defined by what can be inferred from the abstract nature of 'mathematical truth'.

I turn now to an examination of my formulation of the argument, and, more precisely, to the notion of 'existence'.

*3.1. Premise (i) of My Formulation:*

*'The idea of God as a most highly perfect being exists in my mind as does the idea of a figure or a number.'*

This premise has three parts. First, it states the definition which Descartes attaches to the term 'God', i.e. 'a most highly perfect being'. Secondly, it affirms that the idea 'God' 'exists' in the mind. Thirdly, it clarifies that this idea 'exists' in the mind like a figure or a number, i.e. it exists 'clearly and distinctly'.

Contained in Descartes' definition of 'God' is the implication that such a 'being' would be in possession of 'perfection' in all possible manners. The 'perfection' that is central to his argument is that of 'existence'. This premise establishes this 'perfection', however, only in terms of 'existence' in the mind as a 'clear and distinct idea'. Thus, this premise is accepted on the grounds that it seems basically to be his definition of the term 'God', and claims only that the idea 'God' 'exists' 'clearly and distinctly' in the mind.

I do, however, think that this premise is not adequately defended in the *Meditations*. In both the Third as well as the Fifth Meditation, Descartes assumes that 'God' is 'a most highly perfect being'; but the Fifth Meditation, I shall argue, provides a context within which to interpret what this could imply. This notion plays an important role in his argument from 'perfection' (Third Meditation), wherein he claims that 'God' is the 'ultimate cause'. But nowhere in this Meditation (or anywhere else in the *Meditations*) does he present an argument in support of it. It is my contention that he comes closest to doing so with his reliance on 'mathematical truths' in the Fifth Meditation. These 'truths', if they are taken to be paradigmatic as I argue, delineate what Descartes is able to claim

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with his notion of 'perfection'. In my view, the notion remains abstract, and so his argument in the Third Meditation, which attributes a causal nature to 'God', taken together with his reasoning in the Fifth Meditation, would not be sound. It would not be sound because, in my opinion, his usage of 'causal' turns out to be equivocal. Interpreted in terms of the Fifth Meditation, 'causal' would seem to imply some abstract perfection. Here is an example of what I mean: Given an indeterminately extended line that intersects both points A and B, this indeterminately extended line is, therefore, the 'cause' of the line segment AB. But in the Third Meditation, Descartes clearly uses causal in a different manner, namely as 'creator' and 'preserver' of himself and all things.

This first premise, however, claims only that the idea 'God' as 'a most perfect being' 'exists' in the mind, as I stated above, and so, for the 'ontological' proof of the Fifth Meditation it is acceptable, at least for my purpose. I want to focus now on his notion of 'existence'.

*3.2. Premise (ii) of My Formulation:*

*'I perceive clearly and distinctly that a most highly perfect being always exists as with the demonstration of an attribute of a figure or number.'*

The second premise claims that 'God', i.e. 'a most highly perfect being', 'exists' 'always'. This is the case because 'a most highly perfect being' would only be 'most highly perfect' if it 'always exists', rather than not existing or only existing for a certain duration. Descartes is therefore claiming, in this premise, the 'perfection' of 'existence' in a manner distinct from his claim in the first premise. The previous premise, we might say, claims a conceptual form of 'existence'; whereas this premise claims, I shall argue, an abstract form of 'existence'. We have already discussed in the first section the manner in which Descartes views 'existence' as a perfection. But this notion is important to Descartes' defense of the second premise. So we shall review it here.

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Descartes defends this premise in the following manner. He argues that "existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than it can be separated from the essence of a triangle that the magnitude of its three angles is equal to two right ones. . . it would be just as contradictory to cogitate God (that is, a most highly perfect being) in whom existence would be lacking (that is, in whom a perfection would be lacking) as to cogitate a mountain from which a valley would be missing." Thus, *assuming* that 'existence' is a 'perfection', then, 'existence' could *not* not be part of what is meant by 'God.'

The subjects 'triangle,' 'mountain,' 'horse' seem to be similar types of subjects in one respect, whereas 'God' seems to be quite different in exactly this respect. More precisely, in neither of these former cases does the thinking of the thing require the 'existence' of the thing, which is the requirement of the thinking of the subject 'God.' Just in case a triangle actually 'exists', then it will have three angles; its angles will be equal to two right angles (assuming it is Euclidean); just in case a mountain 'exists', then it will have a valley; just in case a horse 'exists', then it will not have wings. These subjects can be thought whether they 'exist' or not. Thus, according to Descartes, there is a certain freedom realized in the thinking of these subjects that does not extend to the thinking of 'God': "I am not free to cogitate [Him] without existence (that is, a most perfect being without the highest perfection)", Descartes argues, "as I am free to imagine a horse with wings or without wings."<sup>22</sup> These subjects, in other words, can 'exist' in the mind alone, but the subject 'God' cannot.

The problem that I see with Descartes' reasoning here is that he only allows for 'existence' in the mind and 'existence' in the world with regard, specifically, to the 'mathematical truths', even though he has already implied a third type of 'existence'. The 'mathematical truths' he speaks of earlier in the Meditation as being independent of the mind, immutable and eternal,<sup>23</sup> and holds

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<sup>22</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>23</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, 65.

as well that we do not have empirical experiences of such things.<sup>24</sup> It seems, then, that, on the one hand, Descartes maintains that these 'truths' don't exist only in the mind, and, on the other hand, that they do 'exist' only in the mind. My claim is that this is inconsistent, and that his earlier description of these 'truths' as being immutable, eternal and independent of the mind implies a type of 'existence' that is neither empirical, nor conceptual. The present defense of the second premise, then, as I see it, is not successful. It is unsuccessful because the inseparability of 'existence' from 'essence' argument applies not just to 'God', as he argues, but to 'mathematical truths' as well because implied in Descartes' reasoning concerning the 'mathematical truths' is the notion that they are necessary in an abstract manner. 'And, although they would in a certain manner be cogitated by me at will,' Descartes maintains, 'they are not feigned by me, but rather do they have their own true and immutable natures. So that, when I imagine a triangle, for example, even if such a figure would perhaps exist nowhere in the world outside my cogitation –nor would it ever have existed-, there still is, in fact, a certain determinate nature or essence or form of it, which has not been feigned by me, nor does it depend on my mind'. I understand Descartes' affirmation of 'their own true and immutable natures' and 'a certain determinate nature or essence or form' together with his denial that 'such a figure would perhaps exist nowhere in the world outside my cogitation' to imply that the 'mathematical truths' indeed do 'exist' outside of the mind, though not in the world. Thus, this 'existence outside of the mind' I understand to be a kind of necessary ('immutable and eternal') and abstract ('nor does it depend on my mind') 'existence'.

### *3.2.1. Abstract Nature of 'Mathematical Truth'*

I want to put aside the question of whether 'existence' is a 'perfection', however, and look at what type of 'existence' Descartes, in any case, is actually able to claim. I have said already that this premise claims an abstract form of

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<sup>24</sup> See note 13 above.

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'existence' for 'God'. I shall explain here why this is the case. Here, then, I turn to what I deem to be the central aspect of my reading of Descartes' Fifth Meditation, and particularly the 'ontological' argument.

For Descartes, 'God' contains the 'perfection' of 'always existing'. If we understand this claim in terms of the paradigm of 'mathematical truth', which I believe we must, then it seems to be the case that 'always exists' can be taken to mean only 'always exists like figures and numbers'. A 'figure or number', for Descartes, 'always exists' independently of whether or not it is cogitated, 'immutably and eternally'. Thus, the second premise, while not equating 'God' with 'mathematical truth', is only able to further the 'perfection' of 'existence' by means of affirming an abstract 'existence' which is 'more perfect' than conceptual 'existence'. This 'more perfect' form of 'existence', as I have just called it, is, therefore, what is ultimately implied by Descartes' conception of 'God' as 'a most highly perfect being'. Thus, the 'ontological' argument requires a conception of 'God' as an 'abstract being'.

It is not my contention that this conception, though, is what Descartes intends to affirm. He seems to intend to imply that 'God' is a 'most highly perfect being' in a general sense: most highly perfect than all perfect 'being' (including what we could dub 'abstract being'). His reasoning seems to imply, however, only that 'God' can be understood to mean 'a most highly perfect being' in terms of the abstract 'being' of 'mathematical truth', as I have just shown. Thus, my claim is that this understanding of 'most highly perfect being' is the only consistent interpretation of what Descartes can *show* with his 'ontological' proof. His usage of 'existence' to imply more than this is, according to my reading, therefore, equivocal.

*3.2.1.1. Conceding 'Existence' as a 'Perfection'*

It seems, then, that 'existence', understood in this manner, would not result in the same existence as a perfection problem: for the proof establishes,

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according to my reading, only that 'God' exists conceptually and abstractly. There would indeed, however, still remain a problem with conceiving of 'existence' as a 'perfection' even in this sense; but I have shown that the question, now, is whether or not 'abstract existence' adds anything to the notion 'God'. Assuming 'abstract existence' to be objective in some sense, then it would seem to be the case that it does. Descartes' argument, *if* we grant the claim that 'abstract existence' is a 'perfection', however, seems effective in proving the 'existence' of 'God', a 'God' which is only an abstract entity. This implies that 'God', according to Descartes' 'ontological' proof (though not necessarily for Descartes), is devoid of a 'personal' nature, i.e. a nature to which might pertain characteristics such as 'omnipotent', 'omniscient', 'omnibenevolent', 'omniproductive', 'omnipresent', or as 'longsuffering', 'loving', 'mighty', 'creator', 'redeemer' and 'sanctifier', 'trinity', 'incarnate'.

Returning to the issue of causality, it follows from this line of reasoning as well, therefore, that if Descartes' proof can show consistently only that 'a most highly perfect being' 'exists' abstractly, then Descartes' claim in the Third Meditation that 'God' is the 'ultimate cause', again, seems to be equivocal. Above I suggested that this claim would be equivocal on the grounds that it is used in a manner that is inconsistent with the notion of 'perfection' that Descartes' Fifth Meditation seems to require. My suggestion here is that it would be equivocal because it would not correspond with what he is able to *show* in the Fifth Meditation concerning the 'existence' of 'God'.

*3.3. Conclusion of My Formulation:*

*'Therefore, the existence of God is at least as certain as mathematical truths.'*

The forgoing discussion (from 3.1. on) demonstrates that this conclusion can be accepted (i) if it is granted (as I wish to do for the sake of this discussion) that 'abstract existence' is a perfection and (ii) if the 'perfection' of 'existence' is here taken to mean 'conceptual and abstract existence'.

#### *4. Circularity and Apophasis*

It might be argued that implicit in my analysis of Descartes' 'ontological' proof is the further claim that Descartes' argument is circular. At the end of the first section, however, I suggested that Descartes' position could be taken in an apophatic sense. This, I think, would be a more charitable approach to Descartes' reasoning. Here I shall show, first, how the argument could be viewed as being circular. Secondly, I shall show how Descartes' reasoning could be interpreted in an apophatic manner.

##### *4.1. Circularity*

The following line of reasoning exposes the apparent problem with Descartes' reasoning:

[13] And, although an attentive consideration has been needed for me to perceive this [i.e. the existence of God] itself, yet now not only am I equally as certain of it as of all else that seems most certain, but also I notice, in addition, that the certitude of the other things so depends on this itself that nothing could ever be known perfectly without it.<sup>25</sup>

If this last clause is taken seriously, then what was affirmed about the certainty of mathematical truths, namely that they are the 'most certain', becomes problematic. I have said that if we grant that 'abstract existence' is a perfection, then Descartes' 'ontological' argument is successful in proving the 'existence' of an abstract 'God'; but his reliance on 'mathematical truth', nevertheless, might result in circular reasoning.

Descartes seems to view the essence-existence problem as the only issue that might affect the soundness of his argument, and having become certain of its role in the second premise – 'as certain of it as of all else that seems most certain' –

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

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he then determines that 'the certitude of the other things so depends on this itself that nothing could ever be known perfectly without it.' The certainty of the most certain truths of mathematics are no longer the most certain truths; for they are dependent upon the truth of the 'existence' of 'God'. But the notion of the 'existence' of 'God' has been arrived at within the context of the certainty of mathematical truths. For if no 'perfect knowledge' (i.e., certainty) is possible apart from this 'one cognition of the true God', then this 'one cognition of the true God' is itself impossible to arrive at certainly because the 'most certain' truths of mathematics have been necessary for doing so. That which was indubitable for the discerning of this 'one cognition of the true God' is now dubitable except for this 'one cognition.'

If 'existence' can be understood consistently only in terms of the abstract nature of 'mathematical truth', then his overarching line of reasoning seems to be something like this: if 'mathematical truth' always exists (abstractly), then 'God' always exists (abstractly); if 'God' always exists (abstractly), then 'mathematical truths' always exist (abstractly). Therefore, if 'mathematical truth' always exists (abstractly), then 'mathematical truth' always exists (abstractly).<sup>26</sup>

If this syllogism accurately characterizes Descartes' thought, then it amounts to nothing more than 'if A, then A'. Thus, Descartes' 'ontological' argument relies on circular reasoning.

4.2. Denys' 'Sculptor Analogy' and Rational-Ikon

Is it the case that Descartes' reasoning evinces an overt circularity? It seems to me to do so. But, as I see it, one could interpret Descartes' present

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<sup>26</sup> cf. *Objections and Replies*, op cit., 102-3. Caterus argues that Descartes equivocates by affirming that nothing can be clearly known apart from a certain knowledge of God, but that he knows himself clearly and distinctly to be a thinking thing. Descartes' rather ineffective reply is this: "When I said that we can know nothing for certain until we are aware that God exists, I expressly declared that I was speaking only of knowledge of those conclusions which can be recalled when we are no longer attending to the arguments by means of which we deduced them. Now awareness of first principles is not normally called knowledge by dialecticians." First principles presumably would be things like his *cogito* and the truths of mathematics; both of which he speaks of in terms of epistemic certainty.



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affirmation of the certainty of the idea of 'God', apart from which nothing else could be certain, as a slightly veiled form of apophatic thought. It is apophatic thought of a different order than that of Denys' because it is purely philosophical, whereas Denys' approach is avowedly theological. But more importantly, it is different because it is utterly natural in its approach and makes full use of rational proof, whereas Denys is, according to his own estimation, concerned solely with revelation and never addresses proof directly. And finally, it is different because of its insistence upon the acquisition of certainty, a notion which is foreign to Denys' position. But since I think that Descartes' 'ontological' argument seems only to affirm an abstract entity which is called 'God', I think that it is important to consider whether or not it is more plausible, nevertheless, i.e. even though Descartes is not attempting such a thing himself, that 'God' is unknowable. It is my contention that this is, implicitly suggested by the inadequacy of his 'ontological' argument. The inadequacy of the proof, again, is rooted, for me, in its conception of 'God' as an abstract entity, not with the question of 'existence' as a predicate (at least in terms of the present discussion). Thus, I have conceded the latter, and here I shall offer an alternative interpretation of the former, which will address the charge of circularity as well.

*4.2.1. From Cartesian Apophasis to Dionysian Apophasis*

Descartes' own estimation of the certainty of the 'clear and distinct idea' of 'God' seems itself to suggest a certain degree of apophatic thought.

[14] For, even if I be of such a nature that, so long as I am very clearly and distinctly perceiving something, I could not not believe that it is true, . . . Other reasons can still be offered which –if I were ignorant of God– would easily throw me off from the opinion, and thus I would never have true and certain knowledge of anything, but rather would I ever have only vague and changeable opinions on everything. . . But, after I have perceived that there is a God, because I have simultaneously also understood that all the other things depend on him and that

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he is not a deceiver –and I have therefrom gathered that all those things which I clearly and distinctly perceive are necessarily true-, even if I were no longer to be paying attention to the reasons of which I have judged that this is true, if only I would remember that I have clearly and distinctly perceived it, no contrary reason can be offered that might impel me to doubt it, but rather do I have true and certain knowledge of it. . . . And thus do I plainly see that the certitude and truth of all knowledge depends on the one cognition of the true God –so much so that, before I would know him, I could have perfectly known nothing about any other thing. But now innumerable things –both of God himself and of other intellectual things, as well as, too, of all that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics- can be fully known by, and certain to, me.<sup>27</sup>

For the truth and certainty at one time thought to be thorough and sure with regard to 'mathematical truths' now seems to require constant attention to demonstration for the sense of truth and certainty to be a persuasive element.<sup>28</sup> This sense of truth and certainty Descartes seems to conceive of now as being inferior to a greater sense of truth and certainty which is occasioned by the perception of the 'clear and distinct idea' of 'God'. It seems only to be required that the truth of 'God' be remembered, however, not that the mind remain fixed on the demonstration of this truth, for this sense of truth and certainty to be effective when 'doubt' arises. Furthermore, this sort of truth and certainty though resident in the mind and determinable thereby seems also to be unconstrained by the inherent weaknesses of the mind which are occasioned at least by sense perception. Thus, the 'mathematical truths' no longer seem to be the 'most true' because he seems to deny his former claim that 'mathematical truths' are the most certain truths. Nevertheless, his own concern with the 'existence' of 'God' has explicitly to do with guarding against 'changeable opinions' and foundationalizing all knowledge; apophysis is, therefore, implicit.

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 69-0.

<sup>28</sup> cf. 69, the example of 'considering the nature of a triangle.'

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Furthermore, in the first section of this chapter, I pointed out that his initial aim in the Meditation is to examine whether or not certain 'ideas' of material things are 'distinct' or 'confused'. There I pointed out that, by means of empirical phenomena, Descartes investigates the 'clear and distinct' ideas of 'material things', and, by this means, ultimately affirms the 'existence' of 'God'. We have, therefore, it would seem, the lineaments of a Dionysian paradigm in Descartes' reasoning even prior to his claim concerning the certainty of 'mathematical truths'. There is a progression from the empirical, to the rational to. . .and here the analogy falters because for Denys 'unknowing' ensues, but for Descartes, certainty is achieved. If I am correct in suggesting that apophysis seems to be a tacit element of Descartes' reasoning, then his notion of 'certainty' seems to suggest a tacit sense of 'unknowing'.

A Dionysian apophatic interpretation of Descartes' implicit apophysis which might circumvent the charge of circularity, begins with rational-ikon. For example, Descartes' denial of the affirmation that 'mathematical truths' are the most certain alone seems to suggest that 'mathematical truths', while necessary for getting to the truth of the 'existence' of 'God', must ultimately be removed in order to reveal the 'existence' of 'God'. If we take this denial in terms of what I have dubbed Denys' notion of rational-ikon and his 'sculptor' analogy, then this tacit apophatic move, while reevaluating the role of 'mathematical truths', namely that they are necessary but not sufficient, would seem also to suggest, at least for the sake of consistency alone, the need for the same type of apophatic reevaluation of the notion of the 'abstract existence of God'.

Furthermore, we determined in chapter Two that, according to Denys, whatever becomes known by means of sense-awareness and reason is spoken of kataphatically, and according to the method of unknowing such statements are apophasized. This process was treated in terms of Moses' Sinaitic ascent (*MT* I 1000c-1001a). It was argued that Moses' ascent accents three existential elements

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of unknowing: purification, illumination and union. These, I suggested, together form an epistemic ethic of unknowing. But the Moses example is, in comparison with Descartes, rather explicit. His endeavor, moreover, is quite different from Descartes'. With Moses we have an explicit context of religious sentiment and worship, and so Moses 'purifies himself' of the empirical elements of worship. By means of empirical phenomena he goes into empirical things to contemplate the One who dwells within them, and so is united with the beyond-being. Descartes' Fifth Meditation, though different from Moses' Sinaitic ascent, can be viewed, nevertheless, in an analogous manner, though devoid of a context of religious sentiment and worship.

Denys' 'sculptor analogy', suggests, as we noted, that the theologian, like Moses, would be 'just as the ones creating (*ποιοῦντες*) a statue of natural things, removing everything that is an obstruction to the true sight of that which is hidden, and revealing this hidden beauty by means of negation alone' (MT II, 1025b). It was suggested that this analogy could be taken to refer to the creative process in general, although the analogy seems explicitly to refer to the creative process of sculpting. Furthermore, the analogy seems to emphasize effectively, as we noted, that apophasis is a necessary methodological element of the creative process. I argued that Denys' interest in the analogy lies in what we called his notion of 'theological' creativity, rather than in an artistic or scientific form of creativity. However, I also argued that his theory seems to recognize these other forms to be ikons of the theological; in other words, according to his position, other forms of creativity, e.g. artistic or scientific, would in one way or another employ apophatic thought as well. Here, I suggest, that Denys' position seems to imply that philosophical creativity, for Descartes, seems to do the same.

The question arises, therefore, as it did in chapter Two regarding Denys' position, as to what it is that might be taken to be Descartes' *medium* of philosophical creation? Denys' medium is himself (or, more properly, the denial

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of himself), but the sculptor's is marble, metal, stone; the painter's is paint; the writer's is words; the musician's is music; the scientist's is nature. The obvious answer might be that Descartes' medium is reason; and this, it seems to me, is accurate, but could be defined a bit more precisely. We noted that his discussion began with an interest in the 'clear and distinct ideas' of 'material things'. Given this interest, we might then want to suggest that his medium is, rather than the general notion of reason, a specific aspect of reason, namely 'ideas'. More specifically, Descartes' medium could be taken to be the 'clear and distinct idea' of the 'existence' of 'God', which I have argued is an abstract notion.

Another question, then, arises. What is it that Descartes is supposed to be understood to be *producing*? The theologian, according to Denys, produces (synergistically) a 'deified' person; the sculptor produces a sculpture; the painter a painting; the writer a written work; the musician a musical composition; the scientist (ideally) a natural law, or some aspect thereof. We have noted in the course of this chapter that Descartes' interest is in achieving certainty. Thus, conceived of in terms of the above analogy, this goal would imply that his aim in the Fifth Meditation is to produce certainty as regards the 'existence' of 'God'.

I argued, in the second chapter, that the sculptor, the scientist, the poet, the musician and the painter, for example, each creates the thing of which it is his/her occupation's purpose to produce, namely a sculpture, a physical law, a poem, a piece of music, a painting, respectively. And, in the context of Denys' thought, I argued that each of these types of 'creations' reveals a beauty that prior to the creative process was hidden. These types of 'creation', to put it differently, reveal a beauty that is empirical and rational (at least partially so), because beauty in these instances is mediate-able through material, language and mathematics. The theologian, on the other hand, (Moses e.g.) in one sense has nothing to show for his labors because beauty in the theological sense is not mediate-able. Moses' apophatic efforts, according to Denys' position, can never result in some piece of

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writing, art or music, e.g., that has captured the fullness of the beauty of the beyond-being, as a sculptor, writer, or scientist might well be said to have captured the beauty of his/her subject. Moses, we noted, meets not with a certain aspect of the process of relational beauty, but with the Source and End of the process Itself. Denys envisions this goal as being that of becoming a purified, illuminated and wholly united ikon of the infinite presence of the process of relational beauty. Descartes' goal of certainty, however, seems to be completely at odds with Denys' goal of union.

But taken in terms of being-as-ikon, Descartes' medium and his aim of producing certainty, as it were, results in a position that, as opposed to what Denys claims concerning Moses, realizes a certain aspect of the process of relational beauty, rather than its Source and End. Furthermore, it is this 'certain aspect', I suggest, that the 'ontological' argument dubs 'God' in an implicitly apophatic manner. According to Denys' theory of being-as-ikon, the problem of the claim of 'certainty', then, is that it distorts the ikonic nature of being by means of reducing it to an aspect of itself, and affirming this aspect to be the defining characteristic of being. In this particular instance, the 'existence' of 'God' in Descartes' 'ontological' argument is an isolation of being's rationally-ikonic nature, which, as such, distorts the nature of being by affirming that a certain aspect of being alone, namely the rational aspect, can fully manifest 'God'. Such an 'isolation', from a Dionysian perspective, removes one element from the process of relational beauty, and, therefore, thwarts the possibility of legitimate participation with being, and, therefore the possibility of union with the beyond-being.

But how might this line of reasoning be used to rescue the 'ontological' proof from the charge of circularity? From a Dionysian perspective, Descartes' is a position that engages the infinite presence of the process of relational beauty in terms of rational-ikons, as the scientist's work, from a Dionysian perspective,

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would tell the story, at least in some sense, of this process from the perspective of empirical-ikons. The 'circularity' of his reasoning, therefore, from a Dionysian perspective, is a rational interpretation of 'ideas' as rational-ikons of the beyond-being. From a Dionysian perspective, then, his reasoning, rather than being viewed as going in a 'circle', goes into its idea-ikons, and, thus, into that which indwells them, by a sculpture-like negation process. My suggestion, then, is that, to rescue the 'ontological' proof from the charge of 'circularity', according to Denys' position, it must be seen not as standing alone in its effort to achieve certainty of the existence of God, but as being part of a relational network of rational-ikons which each reveals, according to its capacity, the beyond-being by means of the process of relational beauty. In this way, my claim that the 'ontological' argument can only show that 'God' exists abstractly, is an acceptable conclusion because, as a rational-ikon, it too must ultimately be negated.

Such an interpretation of Descartes' reasoning implies, moreover, a re-evaluation of his notion of 'certainty'. Seen in the context of Denys' process of relational beauty, a claim of certainty is a kataphatic rational-ikon that, according to Denys' position, would itself require apophasis. Insofar as 'certainty' is viewed in this manner, according to a Dionysian perspective, then it, as a rational-ikon of the beyond-being, manifests the mystery of beyond-being as well as the mystery of being, and so can be interpreted as a kind of 'unknowing' on account of its ikonic nature. Put differently, the 'certainty' that 'God' 'exists' conceptually and abstractly, if a Dionysian position is solicited, becomes certainty-as-ikon, and so the acknowledgement of the ikon as presence of the beyond-being relativizes the possible scope of 'certainty'. Thus relativized, it manifests the 'rays of the Divine splendor', as Denys would have it, and so is an occasion of 'unknowing'. But

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insofar as it is not viewed in this manner, according to Denys' position, 'certainty' becomes an idol.<sup>29</sup>

## *5. Conclusion*

### *5.1. Summary of the Main Argument*

'Existence' is a 'perfection', for Descartes, if and only if the essence-existence distinction does not hold with the subject 'God'. This distinction, he argues, does not hold. I have argued that even if we grant this point, the argument is still only able to show that 'God', at the most, exists abstractly because it presents 'most highly perfect being' in such a way that it can only be consistently understood in the Fifth Meditation in terms of what I have called the abstract being of 'mathematical truth'. Thus, though the argument might be taken to be sound, as it were, if grant this point, there remains a gap between theistic proof and theology. My reading of Descartes' Fifth Meditation implies as well that a 'circular' line of reasoning seems to plague his thinking. But I have suggested alternatively that this situation could be interpreted as a form of 'apophatic' thought, and that, taken in a Dionysian sense, his could be seen as a position that treats the rational ikons of ideas, in which case his notion of 'certainty' becomes a form of 'unknowing'. Such an interpretation, in my opinion, bridges the gap, as it were, between theistic proof and theology.

### *5.2. Final Thoughts*

I find it difficult to view the Fifth Meditation as offering a way of conceiving of 'clear and distinct ideas' except by means of 'mathematical truths.' For since I see 'mathematical truths' as the initial and only example of 'clear and distinct ideas' (except for the idea of 'God' and the *cogito*, which is assumed),

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<sup>29</sup> This case could be made, as I see it, from the perspective of Denys' notion of the hierarchy of knowledge, namely that empirical being is hierarchically anterior, according to Denys' notion of participation, to rational being. If the case were to be made beginning with Denys' notion of kataphasis in this way, then it would progress into the kind of case that I have just presented because, as I have argued with the previous chapters, kataphasis, according to my reading of Denys, necessarily implies apophasis, and apophasis necessarily assumes kataphasis. But I have not made the above case in this manner; I have focused attention on Denys' 'sculptor analogy'.



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then I, therefore, find it difficult to distinguish between 'clear and distinct ideas' and 'mathematical truths' finely enough to be able to think of 'clear and distinct ideas' independently of 'mathematical truths.' In my opinion, if Descartes had not offered any other 'clear and distinct ideas' apart from the 'clear and distinct idea of the existence of God', then, given that the *cogito* is not appealed to, his 'ontological' argument would suffer from incoherence because the notion of 'clear and distinct ideas' would be too vague; his appeal to 'mathematical truths', however, in my opinion, makes it clear what the argument is able to show in terms of conceiving of 'God' as a 'clear and distinct idea'. And, furthermore, this 'appeal' as an affirmation over against the denial of certainty with regard to material things alone taken together with his subsequent denial of this 'appeal' in the face of the certainty of the 'existence' of 'God', suggests that his reasoning in the Fifth Meditation is apophatic, rather than circular.

Descartes' position is one to which I am personally attracted, though I find it difficult to reconcile it with a traditional notion of God. My Dionysian approach to his 'ontological' argument, I believe, provides a way of affirming the role of *a priori* proof as an important element of the theological endeavor, and, thus, of reconciling Descartes' line of reasoning with a traditional notion of God.

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The following chapter, in a similar manner, provides a way of affirming the role of science as an important element of the theological endeavor. The notion of empirical-being-as-ikon, in my opinion, offers a plausible response when applied to the question of the origin of the sense of the beautiful. We shall turn now to this discussion.

*The Sense of the Beautiful in Scientific Discovery as Apophatic Thought: In  
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1. *Introduction*

In this chapter, I shall use Weinberg and Heisenberg's treatments of beauty to develop a notion of the sense of the beautiful. I shall then suggest that this notion seems to exhibit a sense of apophaticism. Denys' position, for me, then provides a plausible interpretative framework.

2. *Scientific Discovery: The Influence of Beauty*

2.1. *Mercury and Einstein's GTR*

Steven Weinberg, in the context of making his argument for the probability of the discovery of a 'final theory', argues that 'beauty' or 'a sense of the beautiful' plays a significant role in the toil of scientific discovery.<sup>1</sup> In his chapter entitled "Tales of Theory and Experiment", he recounts a 'tale' of Einstein's general theory of relativity.

Since 'the mid-1920's', just a few short years after having introduced it to the world, Einstein's theory of gravitation had begun to affect broadly physicists' understanding of gravity. It seemed that, suddenly, Newton's position was no longer viable; what had once seemed to be a fundamental assumption concerning gravity suddenly was relegated to the level of an apparent scientific error. This was not, however, a total surprise. There had been an on-going difficulty with Newton's system which was recognized at least among specialists. The problem had to do with "a difficulty in understanding the orbit of the planet Mercury." During this time, Weinberg tells us, it was determined "that the orbit of the planet Mercury changes its orientation about 575 seconds in a century" (or a little less than 1/6 of a degree). This was more precession than Newton's theory would allow. Astronomers were able to determine that within Newton's system, Mercury would predictably precess at a rate of '43 seconds per century' slower, that is it 'should precess by 532 seconds per century'. Although this difference might seem negligible, it was well known that Newton's theory might well become untenable

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Weinberg *Dreams of a Final Theory* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 90-165.

on the basis of the resolution of this 43 second discrepancy.<sup>2</sup> Einstein's theory, according to Weinberg, was taken by many at the time as having dealt the leveling blow. But the available evidence would not have supported such a conclusion.

## *2.2. Light Rays and Einstein's GTR*

Weinberg reminds us of the difference between a *prediction* and a *retrodiction*. The former, although important for scientific theories, provides a weaker degree of support than does the latter. The reason for this, Weinberg argues, is that retrodiction deals with an 'already-known' anomaly, whereas a prediction suggests 'a new effect.'<sup>3</sup> Einstein's general theory of relativity, for example, predicts that "[t]he photons in a ray of light are deflected by gravitational fields."<sup>4</sup> This was shown to be the case; but the experiments had to be conducted. In the case of Mercury's precession, the experiments had been done; the empirical data was available, and Einstein's theory explained the data. But this was not the case with the deflection of photons by a gravitational field. In this case, the theory suggests a certain type of empirical data that might be discovered. With an anomaly that is dealt with retrodictively, the theory either solves the empirical problem or it does not. However, a new effect that is predicted by a theory needs empirical data to support it, and, according to Weinberg, data that is gathered in this manner should always be treated as suspect because the experimenters might well have a theoretical ax to grind, the 'grinding' of which might well be accomplished with the 'rock' of empirical data. It is less likely, however, that a theorist would develop his/her theory to explain some existing anomaly, according to Weinberg, than it is that an experimenter would tweak his/her evidence to support a very attractive and useful theory.

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<sup>2</sup> Weinberg points out that "[a] theory like Newton's theory of gravitation that has an enormous scope of application is always plagued by experimental anomalies." So even though this problem existed and was well known, it was not until Einstein's theory solved it that the importance of the anomaly was accurately evaluated (Weinberg, *op cit.*, 93-4).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

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*2.2.1. Experimental Support: Retrodiction and Prediction*

The general theory of relativity was able to garner both retrodictive and predictive support; but while the retrodictive treatment of Mercury's precession provided more support, according to Weinberg, it is, nevertheless, important to understand that "it is not that experimentalists falsify their data." He continues as follows:

To the best of my knowledge there never has been an important case of outright falsification of data in physics. But experimentalists who know the result that they are theoretically supposed to get naturally find it difficult to stop looking for observational errors when they do not get that result or to go on looking for errors when they do. It is a testimonial to the strength of character of experimentalists that they do not always get the results they expect.<sup>5</sup>

The interesting thing here is that, until the advent of radar and radio astronomy (in the 1930's), which provided indisputable evidence for the prediction of the deflection of light passing the sun as well as for the motion of Mercury and other bodies as well, this was the only evidence supporting the general theory of relativity, i.e. it was supported by *an* anomaly and *a* prediction. Thus, the general theory of relativity became the scientific ground-swell that we have already mentioned on the basis of two bits of evidence. One would imagine that it might have taken a lot more. Newton's theory had served well for so long; why, Weinberg asks, would we want to abandon it so quickly?<sup>6</sup>

*2.3. Einstein's Belief in GTR*

Einstein himself, corresponding with Arnold Sommerfeld in 1916, "three years before the eclipse expedition,"<sup>7</sup> says this: "Of the general theory of relativity you will be convinced, once you have studied it. Therefore I am not going to

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>6</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, 96-8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

defend it with a single word." This is an exceedingly high degree of confidence; and Einstein refers Sommerfeld to no evidence whatsoever.<sup>8</sup>

Why did Einstein feel such a high degree of confidence?

What was it about the theory itself that was convincing upon studying it?

In Weinberg's estimation, the beauty of the theory alone was convincing. Einstein's theory was so compelling in terms of its aesthetic appeal that belief in it, Weinberg contends, was preserved until further proof became available. Thus, it seems that, according to Weinberg's account, a certain *scientific faith* in theoretical and cosmic beauty allowed Einstein (and other physicists) to wager on its ultimately being justified by experimental data.

Of Einstein's own stamina regarding his theoretical labors, Weinberg says this: "something must have given him enough confidence in the ideas that underlie general relativity to keep him working on it, and this could only have been the attractiveness of the ideas themselves."<sup>9</sup> Before Einstein came across a geometry that would accommodate his theory, working fundamentally on the basis of two guesses or assumptions, (1) "that gravitational and inertial forces were at bottom the same thing...the principle of the equivalence of gravitation and inertia"<sup>10</sup> and (2) "that gravitation is nothing more or less than the effect of the curvature of space and time", when reason would have justifiably resisted further pursuit, he persevered in his work because the beauty of the ideas was so awe-inspiring and so captivating. Neither reason, nor experimental data, according to Weinberg's account, compelled Einstein to press-on, but the pursuit of beauty.

#### *2.4. Scientific Community's Belief in GTR*

The mere fact that 'from 1916 on' Einstein was nominated for Nobel prizes is telling of the broad manner with which this theory was accepted. Before the 1919 expedition, and literally fresh on the heels of having been presented with

<sup>8</sup> cf. *Ibid.*, 101-2. Weinberg admits that Einstein himself may have been influenced by the measurements of Mercury's precession; but, importantly, he does not draw Sommerfeld's attention to this data.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Albert Einstein *The Theory of Relativity* (New York: MJF, 1950), 5-12.

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the theory (in 1915), the scientific community was ready to honor him for his labors.<sup>11</sup>

*2.4.1. Planck: Imagination and Scientific Belief Formation*

Max Planck has argued, as well, that neither reason alone, nor empiricism alone accounts for scientific developments:

The man who handles a bulk of results obtained from an experimental process must have an imaginative picture of the law that he is pursuing. He must embody this in an imaginary hypothesis. The reasoning faculties alone will not help him a step, for no order can emerge from that chaos of elements unless there is the constructive quality of mind which builds up the order by a process of elimination and choice. Again and again the imaginary plan on which one attempts to build up that order breaks down and then we must try another. This imaginative vision and faith in the ultimate success are indispensable. The pure rationalist has no place here.<sup>12</sup>

This would seem to hold as well for the evaluation of a fresh new theory: an 'imaginative vision and faith,' fueled by reason and experimental data must have informed the community of physicists and their critical evaluation of the theory. "The reception of general relativity," Weinberg continues, "depended neither on experimental data alone nor on the intrinsic qualities of the theory alone but on a tangled web of theory and experiment."<sup>13</sup> However, it behooves us to recognize that "[t]he important thing for the progress of physics is not the decision that a theory is true, but the decision that it is worth taking seriously –worth teaching to graduate students, worth writing text books about, above all, worth incorporating into one's own research."<sup>14</sup> To put it differently: Weinberg's contention, like that of Planck's, seems to be that the important thing is that the decision is made,

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<sup>11</sup> Weinberg, *op cit.*, 102-3.

<sup>12</sup> Max Planck, "The Mystery of our Being," in Ken Wilber, ed., *Quantum Questions* (Boston: Shambala Press, 1984), 162.

<sup>13</sup> Weinberg, *op cit.*, 104.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

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regardless of rational or experimental support, that it is compelling enough for physicists to be personally affected by it.

*2.4.1.1. Heisenberg's Analogy and Dirac's Advice*

Heisenberg uses an analogy that can be useful here. "To be sure," he argues, "this rational thinking and careful measurement belong to the scientist's work, just as the hammer and the chisel belong to the work of the sculptor. But in both cases they are merely the tools and not the content of the work."<sup>15</sup> The content, according to Weinberg's position as we have been looking at it, would seem to be beauty because, for him, whether it is contained in a chunk of marble or a tangled web of theory and data, beauty powerfully affects the human psyche in a way that stimulates commitment to the research.

Taken with Planck's notion of 'an imaginative vision and faith' this analogy offers a description of Weinberg's position because, for him, the physicist is committed in a kind of irrational and non-empirically sound manner to an aesthetic vision. Dirac, Weinberg says, was so influenced by the scientific search for beauty that he concluded a talk at Harvard on his work in the development of quantum electrodynamics with this advice to the graduate students: he "advised them to be concerned only with the beauty of their equations, not with what the equations mean."<sup>16</sup>

*3. Weinberg's Description of Beauty*

After dealing with two more examples of the effect of beauty on the scientific endeavor, (1) "quantum electrodynamics –the quantum-mechanical theory of electrons and light,"<sup>17</sup> and (2) "the development and final acceptance of the modern theory of the weak nuclear force,"<sup>18</sup> Weinberg moves in the next chapter, "Beautiful Theories," to a discussion of what is meant by 'beauty' in terms of physical phenomena. Early in the chapter, he makes a telling concession: "I will not try to define beauty, any more than I would try to define love or fear.

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<sup>15</sup> Werner Heisenberg, "Science and the Beautiful," in Wilber, ed., op cit., 69.

<sup>16</sup> Weinberg, op cit., 132.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 107-116.

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You do not define these things; you know them when you *feel* them. Later, after the fact, *you may sometimes be able to say a little to describe them*, as I will try to do here.”<sup>19</sup> This is such an unscientific way of characterizing the work of science that one could mistake these comments as having been offered by an artist, a poet or a religious, which might seem odd at face value. But an indubitable fact remains, one which I believe no one would want to dispute; that fact is simply that scientists, even great minds such as Einstein, are merely human. Weinberg’s comments, his confession as it were, characterize science as something that it indeed really is: a human endeavor. And this characterization seems to reveal another aspect of science that Max Planck has presented well: “Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are part of nature and, therefore, part of the mystery that we are trying to solve. Music and art are, to an extent, also attempts to solve or at least to express the mystery. But to my mind, the more we progress with either, the more we are brought into harmony with all nature itself. And this is one of the great services of science to the individual.”<sup>20</sup> This description seems, in my view, to be in accord with Weinberg’s ‘description’ of beauty.

There are, as Weinberg describes, three aspects of the discernment of a beautiful physical theory: ideational simplicity, epistemological inevitability and logical rigidity.

*3.1. Ideational Simplicity*

One of the ideational moves that Einstein made in his development of the general theory of relativity was, as we noted above, his ‘guess’ (as Weinberg puts it) “that gravitational and inertial forces are at bottom the same thing.”<sup>21</sup> Also, Einstein’s treatment of gravitation and curved space, namely ‘that gravitation is an effect of the curvature of space and time,’<sup>22</sup> exemplifies this aesthetic aspect as

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 116-131.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>20</sup> Planck, *op cit.*, 163.

<sup>21</sup> Weinberg, *op cit.*, 100. Cf. 134ff.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.



well. It is difficult not to hear Ockam's voice at this point, or at least the sound of his razor slicing. Simplicity as a notion has an innate appeal, I think, and Weinberg's point here is well received because it is readily understood by analogy in other fields. At the risk of being too general, it seems not unkind, for example, to characterize any systematization, or systematic thought (I'm thinking particularly of systematic theology) as an effort in or towards ideational simplicity. Furthermore, this is an interesting element of the scientist's aesthetic judgment because simplicity is a bridge notion between the arts and the sciences, though it may well manifest in different manners. A haiku evinces a different sort of simplicity than does the general theory; but each is beautiful, at least in part, because of its simplicity. Heisenberg emphasizes this point as well: "The Latin motto "*Simplex sigillum veri*" – "The simple is the seal of the true"- is inscribed in large letters in the physics auditorium of the University of Göttingen as an admonition to those who would discover what is new; another Latin motto, "*Pulchritudo splendor veritatis*" – "Beauty is the splendor of truth"- can also be interpreted to mean that the researcher first recognizes truth by this splendor, by the way it shines forth."<sup>23</sup>

### *3.2. Epistemological Inevitability*

Epistemological inevitability plays a different role in describing what beauty of a physical theory is. Weinberg speaks of this aspect as having intimately to do with the specialist's evaluation of a theory; there are theories which just seem right, and which seem perfectly balanced just as they are. This aspect might be discernible in a beautiful work of art as well; whether it presents in a physical theory or a sculpture, poem or play, however, does not alter the epistemological impact that it has on our minds. We have all experienced some piece of music, Handel's *Messiah*, for example, or some other piece of art that has impressed itself on our minds in such a way that we conclude, almost in an irrational (or one

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<sup>23</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 62.

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might want to argue *trans*-rational) manner, that it could not be otherwise by one note, one brush stroke, one word and still be the beautiful work that it is.<sup>24</sup>

Although there are probably better examples, an experience of this ilk that I had as a teenager in St. Peter's Basilica stands-out in my mind because of the effect that it had on me. I was sixteen; one of the ladies with whom my friend and I had been traveling had recently lost two of her boys in a tragic school bus accident in southern Texas. But I didn't learn this until after the experience. We were mulling through the Basilica, when quite suddenly I found myself becoming rather struck by Michelangelo's *La Pietà*. I was struck by the representation of Mary holding her son, mourning over his dead body. It seemed to capture beautifully the tender anguish of human sorrow. Later that day I learned of the death of our female companion's two sons. For me, there was no better way to imagine her sense of lose and grief than to remember Michelangelo's *La Pietà*. It was one of the first times in my life that I felt the communicative power of beauty; what Michelangelo uncovered in that chunk of marble connected, for me, the humanity of human sorrow with its reality.

So it is, according to Weinberg, with the specialist and certain beautiful theories such as the general theory.<sup>25</sup> As we noted above, Einstein's conviction concerning the accuracy of the general theory was great, but he was utterly aware of the delicacy of his theory; and it is just this delicacy, as in a piece of fine china, that distinguishes it and makes it beautiful, at least partly. Weinberg quotes him as follows: "The chief attraction of the theory lies in its logical completeness. If a single one of the conclusions drawn from it proves wrong, it must be given up; to modify it without destroying the whole structure seems to be impossible." The term 'logical completeness' does not show up often, if ever, in discussions about poems, plays, sculptures, et cetera. But the tenor of Weinberg's argument seems to imply that Einstein's use of this term is not necessarily in agreement with the manner in which logicians, for example, do proofs of soundness and completeness

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<sup>24</sup> Weinberg, op cit., 148.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 135ff.

on, say, predicate logic. In a looser sense of the term, we might say that William Carlos Williams' poem "The Red Wheelbarrow"<sup>26</sup> is logically complete because of the simplicity and focus of the poem. It is an agreeable description of a wet wheelbarrow and the meaningful importance that it holds for some. The general theory uses the creativity of mathematics as its language for describing gravitation. Poetry uses the linguistic creativity of common language to describe life. Both, though in different manners, are types of mental play that lead us to descriptions which seem to be inevitable. Weinberg puts it like this:

The beauty that we find in physical theories like general relativity of the standard model is very like the beauty conferred on some works of art by the sense of inevitability that they give us –the sense that one would not want to change a note, or a brush stroke or a line. But just as in our appreciation of music or painting or poetry, this sense of inevitability is a matter of taste and experience *and cannot be reduced to formula.*<sup>27</sup>

### *3.3. Logical Rigidity*

The last element that Weinberg describes, logical rigidity, is closely tied to the above aspects, and, as I understand Weinberg, it is something like the power of being myopic. Now certainly myopia is not always a power, but in the sense of focus and concentration it almost certainly is. Of his own endeavor as a physicist, and of the endeavor of "this kind of fundamental physics," he says this: "We are on the track of something universal –something that governs physical phenomena throughout the universe- something that we call the laws of nature. *We do not want to discover a theory that is capable of describing all imaginable kinds of force among the particles of nature. Rather, we hope for a theory that rigidly will allow us to describe only those forces –gravitational, electroweak and strong- that actually as it happens do exist.* This kind of rigidity in our physical theories is part

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<sup>26</sup> The poem in its entirety is as follows: 'so much depends upon/a red wheelbarrow/glazed with rain water/beside the white chickens,' quoted in Williams' *Selected Poems*, ed., Charles Tomlinson, (New York: New Directions, 1985), 56.

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of what we recognize as beauty.”<sup>28</sup> A theory is beautiful in terms of logical rigidity in so far as it describes an existing force or forces, either retrodictively or predictively, simply and inevitably, a beauty which does not mirror the complexity of nature as a whole but merely one of its aspects. By way of counterexample, Weinberg describes his point this way: “Shakespeare’s plays are not spare perfect structures like general relativity or *Oedipus Rex*; they are big messy compositions whose messiness mirrors the complexity of life. That is part of the beauty of his plays, a beauty that to my taste is of a higher order than the beauty of a play of Sophocles or the beauty of general relativity for that matter.”

This aesthetic sense plays a crucial role in discovery and evaluation of theory. But, for Weinberg, “not only is our aesthetic judgment a means to the end of finding scientific explanations and judging their validity –*it is part of what we mean by explanation.*”<sup>29</sup> This aesthetic judgment indwells the work as well as the workmanship of the theorist and the experimentalist, and, therefore, seems to be an indispensable element of the scientific endeavor, for Weinberg, especially with regard to discovery.

With these three notions, Weinberg delineates a sense of the beautiful that is requisite for the work of scientific discovery.

#### *4. The Origin of the Sense of the Beautiful*

But what is the origin of the sense of the beautiful?

“Where then *does* a physicist get a sense of beauty”, Weinberg asks, “that helps not only in discovering theories of the real world, but even in judging the validity of physical theories, sometimes in the teeth of contrary experimental evidence?”<sup>30</sup>

##### *4.1. Weinberg's Evolutionary Theory: An Analogy*

Weinberg suggests that it “has gradually evolved through a natural selection of ideas.” “[T]he universe itself,” he argues, “acts on us as a random,

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<sup>27</sup> Weinberg, *op cit.*, 148. Italics mine.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 147ff. Italics mine.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 149. Italics mine.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 157. Italics mine.

inefficient, and yet in the long run effective, teaching machine.” In this sense, the origin of the scientist’s aesthetic sense, for Weinberg, is not unlike the many years of experience that a racehorse trainer acquires from witnessing the wins and losses of very many horses. “[H]e has come to associate, without being able to express it explicitly,” Weinberg contends, “certain visual cues with the expectation of a winning horse.”<sup>31</sup> The story of the development of aesthetic judgment of physical beauty, Weinberg maintains, is not dissimilar to this case. It has been learned through blood, sweat and tears, as it were, inculcated through the intersection of curiosity and natural phenomena.

This explanation, for Weinberg, provides a helpful step towards inductively affirming the probability of discovering a beautiful final theory, which is Weinberg’s primary concern. He makes this point, interestingly, by means of another analogy -an analogy with Platonic and neo-Platonic thought. “Plato and the neo-Platonists,” Weinberg says, “taught that the beauty we see in nature is a reflection of the beauty of the ultimate, the *nous*. For us, too, the beauty of present theories is an anticipation, a premonition, of the beauty of the final theory.”<sup>32</sup> But more importantly for our discussion, both of these analogies present the origin of the sense of the beautiful in a manner that seems to be tacitly apophatic. (A subject to which we shall turn in the next section.)

#### *4.2. Heisenberg and the Genealogy of Beauty*

But in continuing our discussion of the origin of the sense of the beautiful, I want to proceed by looking at Heisenberg’s comments on the sense of the beautiful and his view of its growth historically. Then we shall turn to the notion of apophasis. We were asking ourselves this question: ‘What is the origin of the sense of the beautiful?’

##### *4.2.1. A Boyhood Experience*

I return here to Heisenberg’s story of his experience of ‘beauty’ which we looked at in chapter One when we were discussing Denys’ notion of beauty.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

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Heisenberg recounts a personal story about his interest in maths as a child. His father was wanting to encourage his Latin studies, so "he brought home to me one day from the National Library," Heisenberg recounts, "a treatise written in Latin by the mathematician Leopold Kronecker."<sup>33</sup> He studied the treatise and was much impressed by it. In it, Heisenberg tells us, Kronecker deals with "the properties of whole numbers...in relation to the geometrical problem of dividing a circle into a number of equal parts."<sup>34</sup>

Heisenberg continues:

I sensed a quite immediate beauty in the fact that, from the problem of partitioning a circle, whose simplest cases were, of course, familiar to us in school, it was possible to learn something about the totally different sort of questions involved in elementary number theory... The impression of something beautiful was, however, perfectly direct; it required no justification or explanation.<sup>35</sup>

Of obvious interest here is his conclusion that the beauty that he felt or experienced was not either a rational or an empirical experience. It was an experience, Heisenberg seems to be saying, which was beyond the need for proof: "it required no justification or explanation." The beauty that he sensed was received on its own merit. Kronecker's work somehow manifested that beauty in a way that strongly affected Heisenberg.<sup>36</sup>

*4.2.1.1. The One and the Many*

His reflection on the experience leads him to consider two ancient notions concerning the question of the One and the many:

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<sup>33</sup> Heisenberg, "Science and the Beautiful," op cit., 56.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 56-7.

<sup>36</sup> Kronecker apparently deplored the idea of irrational numbers and the notion of infinity. George Cantor was a former student of his, and so his forays into infinity developed ultimately into strong opposition from Kronecker, going so far as to accuse Cantor of being a "corrupter of youth" (Cf. Aczel, op cit., 131-7).

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But what was beautiful here? Even in antiquity there were two definitions of beauty which stood in certain opposition to one another...The one describes beauty as the proper conformity of parts to one another, and to the whole. The other, stemming from Plotinus, describes it, without any reference to parts, as the translucence of the eternal splendor of the "one" through the material phenomenon.

Heisenberg classifies his experience as being described by the first definition. "The parts here," he argues, "are the properties of whole numbers and laws of geometric constructions, while the whole is obviously the underlying system of mathematical axioms to which arithmetic and Euclidean geometry belong –the great structure of interconnection guaranteed by the consistency of the axiom system." The 'interconnectedness' of the parts presents itself as though the individual parts do indeed belong together, 'to this whole.' But this experience is unique because, as Heisenberg says: "*without any reflection, we feel the completeness and simplicity of this axiom system to be beautiful.*"

This same element of the sense of the beautiful was evident in Weinberg's description. He likened physical beauty, and the experience of it, to the experience of love or fear, saying: "You do not define these things. You know them when you feel them." The interesting epistemological enigma here, in my opinion, as I mentioned in chapter One as well, is that these knowledge claims seem to arise from sensation, feeling, emotive-based experience.

Heisenberg's notion of beauty leads him to the conclusion that "[b]eauty is therefore involved with the age-old problem of the "one" and the "many" which occupied –in close connection to the problem of "being" and "becoming"–a central position in early Greek philosophy."<sup>37</sup> And, for him, this describes the fundamental nature of the scientific endeavor.

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4.2.1.2. *Beauty and 'First Principle' Thought*

This sense of the beautiful, is for Heisenberg, namely that which we know by feeling, void of any reflection, and for Weinberg, namely that about which we can speak, but only by means of description, central to science. But, Heisenberg argues, that the role that beauty plays in the scientific endeavor was misconstrued from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern era so much so that the significance that it had enjoyed since the time of the Pythagoreans and Plato began to slowly fade into insignificance with the influence of Aristotle, until ultimately thought about nature became increasingly purely empirical, while mathematics became increasingly more rational.

The problem of the origin of the sense of the beautiful, according to Heisenberg, has its roots in the 'basic first principle' thought of the pre-Socratics and the problem of change. It was initially contemplated that a basic first principle would be a physical element –earth (Xenophanes<sup>38</sup>), air (Anaximenes<sup>39</sup>), water (Thales<sup>40</sup>), fire (Heraclitus<sup>41</sup>), but the notion of process, change, alteration, becoming seemed perennially to disallow this prospect, a difficulty which is, as Heisenberg notes, “particularly apparent in the celebrated paradox of Parmenides,<sup>42</sup>” and the other Eleatics (Melissus and Zeno). In the thick of antique thought, according to Heisenberg, even “[a]t the starting point of Greek philosophy of nature,” therefore, we find, not surprisingly, “the roots of exact science” –the ‘problem of the basic first principle’ “from which the colorful variety of phenomena can be explained.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, Italics mine.

<sup>38</sup> cf. Diogenes Laertius *Lives of the Philosophers*, Vol. II, IX 18-20; Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* I xiv 2-6. See also *Early Greek Philosophy*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 93-99, where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>39</sup> cf. Diogenes Laertius, op cit., Vol. I, II 3-5; Hippolytus, op cit., I vii 1-9; Aristotle *On the Heavens* 294b 13-21. See also Barnes, op cit., 77-80, where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>40</sup> cf. Diogenes Laertius, op cit., Vol. I, I 22-44; Aristotle *On the Heavens* 294a: 28-34; *Metaphysics* 983b 6-27. See also Barnes, op cit., 61-70, where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>41</sup> cf. Diogenes Laertius, op cit., Vol. II, IX 1-17; Hippolytus, op cit., IX ix 1-10. See also Barnes, op cit., 100-26, where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>42</sup> cf. Plato *Sopist* 237a; Proclus *Commentary on Parmenides* 708.7-22. See also Barnes, op cit., 129-42, where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>43</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 57-8.



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Underlying the quest for a 'physical first principle' lies the assumption, Heisenberg points out, "that understanding can never mean anything more than the perception of connections, i.e., unitary features or marks of affinity in the manifold."<sup>44</sup> That is, according to Heisenberg, the scientific endeavor assumes the kind of experience he himself had with the Kronecker text, namely an unjustified and unexplained recognition of beauty.

*4.2.1.3. The Parmenidian Problem: The Unified and the  
Manifold*

A troubling element, however (as we just mentioned), soon became apparent: 'if there is a physical unitary principle of all, then how is change to be dealt with.' A physical unitary principle would require a static uniformity of nature, but the dynamic manifold of physical reality requires something quite different. Parmenides, as Heisenberg argues, shifted the discussion into a black-and-white, thesis-antithesis dialogue about Being and Non-Being, which disallows a synthesis and, hence, requires change to be viewed as an illusion, an unbearable paradox for most, the latter point being most emphasized by his disciple, Zeno. The following extract, which is attributed to Parmenides' own verse, would seem to support Heisenberg's claim:

Nor from what is will the strength of trust permit  
it to come to be anything apart from itself...  
Decision in these matters lies in this: it is or it is not...  
How might what is then perish? How might it come into being?  
For if it came into being it is not, nor is it if it is ever going to be.  
Thus generation is quenched and perishing unheard of...  
For powerful necessity holds it enchained in a limit which hems it around,  
because it is right that what is should not be incomplete.  
For it is not lacking –if it were it would lack everything.  
The same thing are thinking and a thought that it is.  
For without what is, in which it has been expressed,

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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you will not find thinking. For nothing either is or will be  
other than what it is, since fate has fettered it  
to be whole and unmoving. Hence all things are a name  
which mortals lay down and trust to be true –  
coming into being and perishing, being and not being,  
and changing place and altering bright colour...  
Henceforward learn mortal opinions, listening to the deceitful arrangement of my  
words.<sup>45</sup>

The dissimilars, being and non-being, for Parmenides, do not both exist, only being exists; and those qualities which appear to be dissimilar aspects of being – e.g.: coming-to-be and perishing, movement and cessation- express incompleteness. Being, however, is utterly complete. Thus, these qualities, expressing incompleteness, cannot be aspects of being. They are merely ‘names which mortals lay down and trust to be true.’ Not only is this untenable to most on purely common-sense grounds, it also decimates the possibility of empiricism. This perspective, indeed, as Heisenberg argues, would seem to make the possibility of science utterly inconceivable.

*4.2.1.4. The Pythagorean Solution*

The Pythagoreans<sup>46</sup> offered another ‘basic first principle,’ mathematics, from which a complex numerology was developed, the center of which was the ‘tetractys’:

At the centre of the numerology was the tetractys or ‘group of four’, consisting of the first four numbers, which together add up to ten. Ten is the perfect number: it contains the important musical ratios, and it can be arranged to form a perfect triangle:

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<sup>45</sup> Simplicius *Commentary on Physics* 144.25-146.27. What I have quoted here is selected portions of Barnes’ translation of this text. On Zeno, see Plato *Parmenides* 127a-128d, Aristotle *Physics* 233a 21-31; 239b 5-240a 18; Simplicius *Commentary on Physics* 138.3-6, 138.29-140.6, 140.18-141.11. See also Barnes, op cit., 129-142 (Parmenides), 150-58 (Zeno), where these and other sources are cited.

<sup>46</sup> cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 985b 23-986a 26, 986b 4-8 and 1092b 8-25; *On the Heavens* 290b 12-29; *Physics* 203a 1-8 and 213b 22-27; Proclus *Commentary on Euclid* 379.1-16, 426.1-9; See also Barnes, 202-13, where these and other sources are cited.

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This is a crucial aspect of Pythagoreanism (apparently for both Pythagorean sects, the 'mathematici' or the 'scientists', as well as the less philosophical 'acusmatici' or 'aphorists') because it is both the *source* and the *end* of philosophical reckoning. From it, the numerical ratios are derived, by means of which harmony is achieved. No matter how the Pythagoreans actually viewed numbers, though it seems that they understood them to be metaphysical realities, there occurs an important shift away from physical elements and physical illusions, as occasioned by Parmenidian thought, toward "an ideal principle of form."<sup>48</sup> Aristotle comments as follows:

At the same time as [Leucippus and Democritus] and earlier than them, the so-called Pythagoreans touched on mathematics: they were the first to bring it forward and, having been brought up in it, to think that its principles were the principles of all the things that exist. Since numbers are by nature the first of these, and since they thought they observed in numbers many similarities to the things that exist and come into being (more so than in fire and earth and water) – for example, that justice is such and such, opportunity something else, and so on for pretty well everything else (and they also saw that the modifications and ratios of harmonies depend on numbers): since, then, all other things appeared to have been modelled on number in their nature, while numbers seemed to be the first things in the whole of nature, they supposed that the elements of numbers were the elements of all things that exist, and that the whole heaven was harmony and number.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Barnes, op cit., 212; see also Tobias Dantzig "Number Lore" and "The Unutterable" in *Number: The Language of Science* (Free Press: 1954), 36-56, 99-103, respectively.

<sup>48</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 59.

<sup>49</sup> Aristotle *Metaphysics* 985b 23-986a 3, quoted in Barnes, op cit., 208-09. Heisenberg quotes some of this passage as well.

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The Pythagoreans, and later Plato, offer primarily a theoretical or rational approach to understanding nature, and so they do little for the advancement of science. Aristotle emphasizes the empirical, but to the detriment of the theoretical, which does little for the advancement of science as well. The problem that arose was, according to Heisenberg, that theory and practice, the parts, as it were, needed to be united into a whole.

"Only from the tension," argues Heisenberg, "the interplay between the wealth of facts and the mathematical forms that may possibly be appropriate to them, can decisive advances spring." This tension, however, was not capitalized upon subsequent to Aristotle's influence until the modern era. He continues as follows:

But in antiquity this tension was no longer acceptable and thus, the road to knowledge diverged for a long time from the road to the beautiful. The significance of the beautiful for the understanding of nature became clearly visible again only at the beginning of the modern period, once the way back had been found from Aristotle to Plato. And only through this change of course did the full fruitfulness become apparent of the mode of thought inaugurated by Pythagoras and Plato.<sup>50</sup>

There was an epistemological dissonance, then, which, according to Heisenberg, lasted from antiquity to the early modern era and the work of, for example:

Copernicus (1473-1543) -heliocentricity (contra Aristotle's  
geocentricity)<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 61. See also his essay "Scientific and Religious Truth," op cit., 40ff, and also his "Quantum Theory and the Roots of Atomic Science" *Physics and Philosophy*, op cit., 59-75.

<sup>51</sup> Heisenberg begins with Galileo; I have mentioned Copernicus here, not to contradict Heisenberg, because Galileo was, ultimately, so influenced by him, and his person and work seems to be so defined by his connection with Copernicus. I have no idea why Heisenberg doesn't mention him. I presume that he had his reasons. However, in his essay "Scientific and Religious Truths," in Wilber, ed., op cit., 40ff., he does begin with Copernicus.

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Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) -'laws of falling bodies' (contra Aristotle's  
different rates for different weights)

Tycho Brahe (1546-1601)<sup>52</sup> -his pretelescope observations showed  
Aristotle's view of the permanency of the celestial bodies to be erroneous  
and were instrumental in Kepler's own work with the motions of the  
planets<sup>53</sup>

Johannes Kepler (1573-1630) -his laws of planetary motion

Issac Newton (1642-1727) -Newtonian mechanics and theory of  
Gravitation

Even later, in the contemporary era, the revival of the Pythagorean-Platonic  
emphasis on number and harmony together with the sense of the beautiful has  
resulted, Heisenberg argues, in "the emergence of relativity theory and the  
quantum theory." He maintains that:

In both cases, after years of vain effort at understanding, a bewildering plethora  
of details has been almost suddenly reduced to order by the appearance of a  
connection, largely unintuitable but still ultimately simple in its substance, that  
was immediately found convincing by virtue of its completeness and abstract  
beauty -convincing, that is, to all who could understand and speak such an  
abstract language... "*Pulchritudo splendor veritatis*" -"Beauty is the splendor of  
truth"- can also be interpreted to mean that the researcher first recognizes truth by  
this splendor, by the way it shines forth.<sup>54</sup>

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Hans Reichenbach, in apparent agreement with Heisenberg's point, says this: "The  
significance of Copernicus lies precisely in the fact that he broke with an old belief apparently  
supported by all immediate sensory experience. He could do it only because he had at his disposal  
a considerable amount of accumulated scientific thought and scientific data, only because he  
himself had followed the road of disillusionment in knowledge before he glimpsed new and  
broader perspectives." *From Copernicus to Einstein* (New York: Dover, 1980), 14-5.

<sup>52</sup> I am not aware of Heisenberg referring to Tycho Brahe; my reason for doing so I hope is  
obvious: Kepler rides his experimental coat tails.

<sup>53</sup> Planck I think would disagree with listing Brahe because he speaks of him as merely a  
"researcher" as opposed to Kepler whom he refers to as "the creator of the new astronomy." Cf.  
Planck, op cit., 163.

<sup>54</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 62-3.

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This sense of immediacy, of non-discursive, non-rational direct apprehension, to which Heisenberg refers here is crucial to the scientific developments which we have witnessed over the past five centuries or so.

"Beauty" for Heisenberg, as we noted above, or at least beauty that describes his early experience with Kronecker's treatise, "is the proper conformity of the parts to one another, and to the whole."<sup>55</sup> One rendering of the Greek *harmonia* is consonance (the conformity of the numerical ratios) as opposed to dissonance (the dis-conformity of the numerical ratios); on this definition, 'beauty,' as Heisenberg construes it, and 'harmony' are synonymous.<sup>56</sup>

Here, then, according to Heisenberg, we have the seminal elements of modern and contemporary science: physical phenomena can be understood by means of the harmony or beauty of numbers. Mathematics was the language of choice for the Pythagoreans. But the scientific enterprise, Heisenberg tells us, was stifled because of the lack of 'empirical knowledge' and the over-abundance of 'theoretical knowledge.'

*4.2.2. Images, Archtypes and the 'Relation' Paradigm*

Heisenberg quotes a passage from W. Pauli that I want to present here:

The process of understanding in nature, together with the joy that man feels in understanding, i.e., in becoming acquainted with new knowledge, seems therefore to rest upon a correspondence, a coming into congruence of preexistent internal images of the human psyche with external objects and their behavior. This view of natural knowledge goes back, of course, to Plato and was... also very plainly adopted by Kepler. The latter speaks, in fact, of Ideas, preexistent in the mind of God and imprinted accordingly upon the soul, as the image of God. These primal images, which the soul can perceive by means of an innate instinct, Kepler calls

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<sup>55</sup> Heisenberg, *op cit.*, 58.

<sup>56</sup> The role of string theory and M-theory might well be the birthing of a beautiful 'final theory', bringing into harmony, e.g., antique convictions and contemporary data (e.g., '10' as the perfect number and 10 dimensions in string theory). Cf. Michio Kaku *Beyond Einstein: The Cosmic Quest for the Theory of the Universe* (New York: Anchor, 1995) and Weinberg's, *op cit.*, especially chs. 9 and 10.

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archetypes. There is very wide-ranging agreement here with the primordial images or archetypes introduced into modern psychology by C. G. Jung, which function as instinctive patterns of ideation. At this stage, the place of clear concepts is taken by images of strongly emotional content, which are not thought but are seen pictorially, as it were, before the mind's eye. Insofar as these images are the expression of a suspected but still unknown state of affairs, they can also be called symbolic, according to the definition of a symbol proposed by Jung. As ordering operators and formatives in this world of symbolic images, the archetypes function, indeed, as the desired bridge between sense perceptions and Ideas, and are therefore also a necessary precondition for the emergence of a scientific theory. Yet one must beware of displacing this *a priori* of knowledge into consciousness, and relating it to specific, rationally formulable Ideas.<sup>57</sup>

This passage emphasizes the notion of harmony –the union of (or ‘correspondence’) ‘preexistent internal images’ or ‘archetypes’ and ‘external objects’ or ‘symbolic images’, which, for Heisenberg, is beauty. “What’s beautiful in science is that same thing that’s beautiful in Beethoven...There’s a fog of events and suddenly you see a connection. It expresses a complex of human concerns that goes deeply to you, that connects things that were always in you that were never put together before.”<sup>58</sup> The implicit epistemology at work in the scientific endeavor seems to be an epistemology of beauty, an epistemology which utilizes reason and experimentation but is influenced by something that is neither rational nor experimental. Thus we hear, consistently, words such as these: “What we *‘feel’* in such moments is the analogy of the part and the whole, object and other object, relation and relation.”<sup>59</sup> And the following from Einstein about Planck:

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-7.

<sup>58</sup> Victor Weisskopf quoted in K. C. Cole *The Universe and the Teacup* (San Diego: HB&J, 1997), 185.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Rothstein quoted in Cole, *op cit.*, 178.

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The longing to behold harmony is the source of the inexhaustable patience and perseverance with which Planck has devoted himself to the most general problems of our science, refusing to let himself be diverted to more grateful and more easily attained ends. I have often heard colleagues try to attribute this attitude of his to extraordinary will-power and discipline –wrongly, in my opinion. The state of mind which enables a man to do work of this kind is akin to that of the religious worshipper or the lover; the daily effort comes from no deliberate intention or program, but straight from the heart.<sup>60</sup>

The working metaphor for how someone knows or comes to know scientific truths, in the words of Rothstein and Einstein, is that of *relationship*: human-non-human, human-human, human-divine. The mysterious characteristic(s) of relationship, the way that humans relate to animals, things, other humans and the divine and the way that humans experience these relationships, forms a meaningful metaphor for the way in which these instrumental thinkers understand and want their readers to understand the nature of the type of work to which they have given their lives.

*4.2.3. The Relationship of the Parts to the Whole*

Returning again to the definition of beauty around which Heisenberg has collected his thoughts, “the proper conformity of the parts to one another, and to the whole,” it is easy to distill this same idea from Heisenberg’s position, not to mention from the ancient Greeks who flirted with the same idea: many parts connect, conform to one another, unite as one, and produce a harmony, a beauty which is reflective of the harmony and beauty which initially began the process. Both the process and the product are relational –the parts relate to form the whole, the whole is by virtue of having been united by means of relations. The leap from this definition of beauty to the other, more neo-Platonic definition which Heisenberg mentioned, “beauty is the translucence, through the material phenomenon, of the eternal splendor of the ‘one,’” is not a great one: “In actual

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<sup>60</sup> Einstein quoted in Wilber, op cit., 157.



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fact, the two definitions are not so very widely removed from one another.”<sup>61</sup> For Heisenberg, the first definition is the “more sober” one, and he is reticent to say anything about the latter, being content to say that the first is “realized in natural science, and...in exact science, no less than in the arts, *it is the most important source of illumination and clarity.*”<sup>62</sup>

*5. A Dionysian Account of the Origin of the Sense of the Beautiful*

Although Heisenberg might have found it difficult to discuss the second of these definitions, though the two in his mind were “not so very widely removed from one another,” the stage has been set, in my mind, with his insight, coupled with Weinberg’s, to do just this. The desire to do so is justified, I believe, on the grounds that, having become persuaded of the efficacy of the first definition, all natural beauty must fit together into some natural whole (the same reason that drives Weinberg and other string-theorists toward a ‘final theory’), which of course is what we call, very properly, the ‘cosmos,’ and this natural whole must itself be a mere piece in some other, greater whole. The analogy is there. But there is also something more semantically: the possibility of viewing science as a metaphor for theology. This is not merely a possibility, however, with St. Denys’ *Corpus*. Here, we are able to develop an epistemology which is driven by beauty, is relational and leads ultimately to the apophatic nature of truth so that metaphor rises to the level of being more true than literal language, both naturally and supernaturally, an epistemology which, I suggest, makes sense of scientists and mathematicians speaking in very non-analytic, unphilosophical terminology such as ‘feels’ and using metaphors of ‘worship’ and ‘fear,’ e.g., to make sense of their work and to convey it to others.

*5.1. Semantics of ‘Beauty’: Aesthetic Judgment and Apophatic Truth*

I want to shift gears here and discuss the nature of apophasis. Apophatic thought can be traced, indeed, back the neo-Platonists (e.g., Plotinus and Proklos). But, even though our primary interest is in Denys’ employment of it and the

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<sup>61</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 57 and 69. Cf. Plotinus *Enneads* (I, 6 [1], 4-9).

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application of his position to the present discourse, I shall turn, first, to a Heraclitean notion of apophasis.

Richard Geldard has recently published an insightful treatise on Heraclitus, *Remembering Heraclitus*, and very importantly he begins his treatise with a discussion of apophasis. He reminds us of the semantic roots of the term: "In the Greek, *apophasis* means denial or negation and is, therefore, a fitting place to examine the aversive thought of Heraclitus."<sup>63</sup> *Kataphasis*, affirmation, is the antithesis of apophasis; though, the ultimate purpose of apophasis is kataphasis. But the fundamental nature of truth, according to Geldard, might well be properly understood as being apophatic.

Geldard reminds us, as well, that the Greek *aletheia* "consists of a prefix *a*, and *lethe*, forgetfulness or forgetting." He continues as follows: "Thus even truth-telling has an aversive cast, being a process of not-forgetting, as opposed to the more affirmative sense in the word knowing."<sup>64</sup> 'To know' is a verb that is used by a speaker to convey an affirmation of knowledge, understanding or truth to the hearer. In terms of contemporary epistemological theory, it is often very difficult to use this verb with any degree of persuasive power, or even with any degree of informational power, if it is used without proper argumentative support. Thus, for many, the term is used in opposition to the verb 'to believe'. One may believe anything he/she wishes or fancies, so it seems, but one may know only what is *provable*. I might have a belief in unicorns, but because I lack evidence of their existence I do not have any knowledge of them. Knowledge, in other words, is understood primarily, as Geldard says, in an affirmative sense: I know that 'x' because I can support, or prove it by 'y' and 'z'. But if truth-telling, i.e. making knowledge claims, is 'a process of not-forgetting', then it takes on an apophatic element. The act of truth-telling, or knowledge-saying, becomes one "of

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<sup>62</sup> Heisenberg, op cit., 69. Italics mine.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Weinberg, op cit., 24.

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uncovering or un-forgetting,”<sup>65</sup> rather than of providing affirmative proof. Hence, we say ‘Scientist so-and-so has *discovered*, i.e. *uncovered*, such-and-such a truth.’

Furthermore, given this notion of apophatic truth, when Heraclitus says “Nature prefers to hide,”<sup>66</sup> he uncovers, or un-forgets, according to Geldard, for us the nature of physical truth. And, for him, it implies that nature must be sought out apophatically. In this way, it could be said that Einstein *uncovered* the general theory of relativity, i.e. he was ultimately able to say what general relativity is by means of ‘not-forgetting’ or ‘uncovering’ the hiddenness of nature.

In relation to Geldard’s notion of apophasis, I want to look at the analogies that Heisenberg and Weinberg have offered.

*5.1.1. Heisenberg’s Analogy*

We looked at Heisenberg’s experience with the Kronecker text in the first chapter in terms of examining Denys’ kataphatic notion of beauty. The perspective here, is to look at his ‘sculptor analogy’, which he presents later in the same essay, as an element of apophatic interpretation of the sense of the beautiful.

The analogy, Heisenberg states as follows: “To be sure, this rational thinking and careful measurement belong to the scientist’s work, just as the hammer and chisel belong to the work of the sculptor. But in both cases they are merely the tools and not the content of the work.”<sup>67</sup> Science conceived of in this manner can be viewed as being analogous to the work of a sculptor. With hammer and chisel, the sculptor chips away the stone to reveal the beautiful form that it contains. The chunk of rock initially appears to be merely a chunk of rock; but the aesthetic judgment of the artist is able to uncover a beauty that would have otherwise been unknown. So too, with reason and empirical data, the scientist chips away at a certain chunk of physical reality, ultimately revealing –or hoping ultimately to reveal- a physical form that is beautiful to behold.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Richard Geldard *Remembering Heraclitus* (Lindisfarne: 2000), 157. φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖ: ‘Nature/being loves to hide itself,’ or ‘Nature/being loves hiding itself.’

<sup>67</sup> cf. Plato *Phaedrus* 252d 7; Plotinus *Enneads* (I, 6 [1], 9); St. Denys *Mystical Theology* 1025A-1025B.

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*5.1.2. Weinberg's Analogies*

In treating the origin of the sense of the beautiful, Weinberg also made use of analogy. First, he argues that the sense of the beautiful is like the expertise of a horse trainer: "he has come to associate, without being able to express it explicitly, certain visual cues with the expectation of a winning horse." And, secondly, he argues that the sense of the beautiful for the scientist is like the Platonic and neo-Platonic sense of beauty: "Plato and the neo-Platonists," Weinberg says, "taught that the beauty we see in nature is a reflection of the beauty of the ultimate, the *nous*. For us, too, the beauty of present theories is an anticipation, a premonition, of the beauty of the final theory." Both of these analogies, too, emphasize a non-rational, non-empirical perspective on the origin of the sense of the beautiful that seems tacitly to suggest a sense of apophatic thought in the sense of, to use Geldard's terminology, 'uncovering' certain visual cues, as it were, and of 'uncovering' the beauty of the ultimate (which for Weinberg is simply the anticipation of a 'final theory', not *nous* or beyond-being, e.g.).

Geldard's reading of Heraclitus, then, can establish a connection between the sense of the beautiful and apophatic thought. But this notion of apophatic thought remains undefined. Why, for example, might it be the case that the sense of the beautiful leads the scientist to 'uncover' empirical beauty? Geldard's position leaves this question unanswered. To address it, then, we shall turn to Denys, and particularly to his 'sculptor analogy' and the notion of empirical-ikon.

*5.2. Denys' 'Sculptor Analogy': Beautiful Empirical Being and  
Beautiful-Empirical-Being-as-Ikon-of-the-Beyond-Being*

We return here to Denys' 'sculptor analogy'. Both in the previous chapter as well as in chapter Two, we have looked at this analogy. As we have seen, Denys uses the analogy to speak of the work of theology. The theologian, he maintains, would be 'just as the ones creating (*ποιοῦντες*) a statue of natural things, removing everything that is an obstruction to the true sight of that which is hidden, and revealing this hidden beauty by means of negation alone' (MT II,

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1025b). I have argued in chapter Two and chapter Four that this analogy, though Denys uses it specifically with regard to Moses and the work of theology, could be taken to refer to the creative process in general. The central element that I have emphasized with this analogy is that of apophasis.

Above, I suggested that if Einstein's discovery of the general theory of relativity is taken in Geldard's sense, then he can be seen as having uncovered the general theory of relativity by means of having 'not-forgotten' the hidden-ness of nature, i.e. by means of having 'not-forgotten' the beauty of empirical being. Denys' notion of beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon adds a metaphysical explanation to such an interpretation.

From a Dionysian perspective, it is not the case simply that 'nature loves to hide', i.e. that empirical-being loves to hide, and that knowledge of it must be sought apophatically, as Geldard's position suggests. Rather, the hidden-ness of empirical-being and knowledge of it is due to empirical beings' empirically-ikonic capacity. That it 'hides', as it were, then, is due to its capacity as an empirical-ikon to 'aim for, love and desire' its Source and End. A scientific 'discovery' which reveals the beauty of empirical-being, Einstein's general theory, for example, then, 'un-forgets' the mystery of the beauty of gravity by means of apophatically sculpting, as it were, and, therefore, as ikon tacitly manifests the beyond-being because of the dual mystery of empirical-being-as-ikon. But because of the mystery of ikon, the general theory does not exhaustively 'un-forget' the empirical being of gravity. Interpreted in terms of the ikonic capacity of empirical-being, the general theory 'un-forgets' the manifestation of the beyond-being in gravity, as well as the nature of gravity as empirical being. If beautiful empirical being is mysterious in its hiddenness, then it refers us, from a Dionysian perspective, to beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon *because* it affirms the mystery of empirical being. Thus, in this sense, i.e. in the sense of beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon, it could be affirmed from a Dionysian perspective that 'nature loves to hide', as it were, and that, therefore, knowledge of it must be sought in an apophatic manner, i.e. by means of 'sculpting', as it were.

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If the sense of the beautiful is interpreted in terms of Denys' notion of apophasis and empirical-ikon, then it suggests a position that would seem ultimately to view the work of science as a kind of theology. This would follow because empirical-ikon infers the mystery of beyond-being because of the mystery of being.

And this is precisely where Denys seems to me to be quite helpful in treating the origin of the sense of the beautiful. His position, in response to the question that I posed above, suggests the process of relational beauty, namely the view that beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being both has the responsibility of kataphatically receiving the world as beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being and apophatically 'aiming for, loving and desiring' (by means of the creative work of 'sculpting', as it were) the beyond-being (705d-708a). According to Dionysian thought, then, the sense of the beautiful is the apophatic response of beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being to the call of the beauty-of-the-beyond-being through the medium of beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being, according to its hierarchical capacity. This means, that beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon participates with the beyond-being by means of apophatically calling back to the calling of the beyond-being. For Denys, this 'calling' on the part of being, is, as we have noted, the process of theosis, so that, in the final analysis, empirical-being, *qua* beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon, itself becomes the responsive call. Nevertheless, although Denys' response resituates the question, as I have suggested, it agrees both with Weinberg's concern for a final theory and Heisenberg's notion of beauty as a part to whole relation. And so it seems to me, therefore, to provide a plausible explanation as to the origin of the sense of the beautiful.

The notion of the manifold manifestation of the beyond-being in empirical-ikon suggests that both of the ancient notions of beauty which Heisenberg has offered, as I just suggested, namely the 'proper conformity of parts to one another, and to the whole' and the 'translucence of eternal splendor of the 'one' through material phenomenon', are applicable to a Dionysian account of

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the apophatic nature of the sense of the beautiful. This follows because the discerning of the manifold manifestation of the beyond-being in empirical-ikon is a process of discerning the beyond-being in the mystery of the beauty of empirical being as beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon-of-the-beauty-of-the-beyond-being. Empirical-ikon, therefore, both manifests the beyond-being and is an empirical 'part', as it were, that is put together to form one empirical 'whole', as it were. This 'whole', as it were, is the 'un-forgetting' of the laws of nature and, ultimately, the 'final theory', as Weinberg has suggested.

Why is a Dionysian position plausible?

A Dionysian perspective on the origin of the sense of the beautiful has an explanatory capacity, that, while reinterpreting the question of the origin of the sense of the beautiful in such a way as to suggest ultimately that science is a kind of theology, is able to maintain the integrity, I believe, of both science and theology. This explanatory capacity is, primarily, the result of his vision of being-as-ikon, applied here in terms of the apophatic aspect of the process of relational beauty. Denys' position, therefore, affirms the role of science, at least in terms of Weinberg's notion of the final theory and Heisenberg's notion of the discernment of beauty in terms of a part to whole relation, as an important element of the theological endeavor.

#### *6. Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have relied on both Weinberg and Heisenberg for a notion of the sense of the beautiful. I have suggested, furthermore, that this notion seems to be amenable to an apophatic interpretation. Denys' position, I have maintained, provides an interpretative framework that, while not being fully consonant with either Weinberg or Heisenberg, seems, nevertheless, to be a plausible option for treating the notion of the sense of the beautiful, particularly with regard to the question of its origin. The sense of the beautiful in science, then, my argument maintains, refers us to the mystery of beautiful empirical being, and the mystery of beautiful empirical being refers us to the mystery of beautiful-empirical-being-as-ikon.

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*6.1. Final Thoughts*

In contradistinction to Karl Popper's approach, for example, I have been interested in examining what could be referred to as an aesthetics of scientific discovery, rather than the deductive method of justification and falsification of scientific theory that Popper is interested in.<sup>68</sup> And the specific aesthetic that I have been interested in applying is of a theological sort which both effects and affects the possibility (as 'Source and End' of being, as Denys puts it) of theory, justification (or falsification) and discovery through the mystery of being-as-ikon. But in terms of Popper's distinction between justification and discovery, my position suggests, I believe, that the sense of the beautiful, from the perspective of being-as-ikon, is a constitutive, i.e. not a heuristic, element of the process of justification and discovery. This seems to follow because if being is ikonic, then the sense of the beautiful is an integral characteristic of being and its epistemological structure whether in terms of theorizing or justifying (or falsifying). So, for me, if the origin of the sense of the beautiful is in the mystery being-as-ikon, then the sense of the beautiful is an integral epistemological aspect of the way that being theorizes, justifies and ultimately makes new discoveries. An examination of the relationship between justification and discovery from the perspective of the sense of the beautiful in terms of being-as-ikon, would, therefore, seem to be a promising one; but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this chapter.

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In the next and final chapter, I argue that Denys' notion of language-as-ikon provides a way of affirming the role of language as an important element of the theological endeavor. I apply this notion in an apophatic manner to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language, in general, and to his notion of silence as meaning, specifically. We shall turn now to this task.

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<sup>68</sup> cf. Karl Popper *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Hutchinson & Co.: 1968), 27-48, 251-284.



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*1. Introduction*

In this chapter, I shall show that meaning, for Merleau-Ponty, is characterized by his notion of 'silence'. Our approach to his position will begin with his comments on the 'algorithmic' approach to language (since this seems to play such an important role in his thinking about language). As an example of this approach, we shall look at D. Davidson's position, first, in the section immediately following, and then, in the following section, turn to Merleau-Ponty's position *per se*. Then, in the final section, I shall offer a Dionysian interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's suggestion.

*2. Davidson's Semantical Theory*

In an essay published in the late 1960's, Davidson presents a theory of meaning that formally unites truth and meaning; this he does in agreement with the general thrust of analytic philosophy. A response to the question 'What is meaning?' must be focused, for him, on the manner in which word-meaning is the source of sentence-meaning. "It is conceded by most philosophers of language", he says,

and recently by some linguists, that a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words. Unless such an account could be supplied for a particular language, there would be no explaining the fact that we can learn the language: no explaining the fact that, on mastering a finite vocabulary and a finite set of rules, we are prepared to produce and to understand any of a potential infinitude of sentences. I do not dispute these vague claims, in which I sense more than a kernel of truth. Instead I want to ask what it is for a theory to give an account of the kind adumbrated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> D. Davidson "Truth and Meaning" in A. P. Martinich, ed., *The Philosophy of Language* (Oxford:1996), 92. Cf. G. Frege *Grundlagen* "Introduction", §29-§33ff; his treatment of the question 'is 'one' a predicate?': 'einheit' ('oneness', 'unity', 'unit'), 'ein' ('one').

Davidson very clearly describes his project in the present essay as one that is fully sympathetic with the general perspective of analytic philosophy: 'a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words.' The question he asks, though, is: 'what is it for a theory to give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words?'

The general answer to this question is: for a theory to give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words' is to give an account of what it is for a sentence to be true. Put differently: a formal semantical theory of meaning for a natural language becomes, in Davidson's position, intertwined with a logical theory of truth. Davidson's position affirms that meaning is consequent to logical truth value: 'what it is for a theory to give an account of this kind' is fundamentally to give an account of a theory of truth. A theory of truth provides the theoretical framework within which the meaning of words, and thus the meaning of sentences is discernable. Analytic thought, in general, has been interested in describing a theory of truth-meaning in an 'empirical' manner, the development of a formal method, a 'well formed formula' (*wff*) as the logician would have it, which would act as an 'algorithm' as it were (to use Merleau-Ponty's phrase), a method into which sentences can be put and out of which we can get distilled forms of pure meaning and truth: a formalized system of natural language. Davidson offers such a method.

A theory of meaning for Davidson (assuming the theoretical framework of a theory of truth) is an empirical theory: "[a] theory of meaning (in my mildly perverse sense) is an empirical theory, and its ambition is to account for the workings of a natural language." A Tarskian semantical theory of truth, he argues, provides the necessary theoretical framework.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, what is necessary for such a theory to be well-formed and adequate is known, according to Davidson. It is possible, Davidson suggests, to account for statements of the form

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$(T) s$  is  $T$  if and only if  $p$

This works out in natural language as a sentence of the form 'Sugar is sweet' is true *iff* (if and only if) sugar is sweet. Davidson continues:

What we require of a theory of meaning for a language  $L$  is that without appeal to any (further) semantical notions it place enough restrictions on the predicate "is  $T$ " to entail all sentences got from schema  $T$  when ' $s$ ' is replaced by a structural description of a sentence of  $L$  and ' $p$ ' by that sentence. . . a theory of meaning for language  $L$  shows "how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words" if it contains a (recursive) definition of truth-in- $L$ . . . : the definition works by giving necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence, and to give truth conditions is a way of giving the meaning of a sentence. To know the semantic concept of truth for a language is to know what it is for a sentence – any sentence- to be true, and this amounts, in one good sense we can give to the phrase, to understanding the language.

Language  $L$  is a thought-experiment language (a metalanguage) in which the semantical problem of natural language is to be worked out. The sentence form suggested  $[(T) s$  is  $T$  if and only if  $p]$  is 'schema  $T$ ' in 'language  $L$ ,' which defines the 'necessary and sufficient' conditions for the semantic value of 'every sentence' of a natural language.

Near the end of his essay, Davidson says this:

In this paper I have assumed that the speakers of a language can effectively determine the meaning or meanings of an arbitrary expression (if it has meaning), and that it is the central task of a theory of meaning to show how this is possible. I have argued that a characterization of a truth predicate describes the required

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Alfred Tarski "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics" in Martinich, ed., op cit., 61-83. And his "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages" in *Logic, Semantics and Mathematics* (Oxford: 1956), 152-278.

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kind of structure, and provides a clear and testable criterion of an adequate semantics for a natural language

The fundamental job of a theory of meaning which shows 'how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words', according to Davidson, is to provide a method by which a speaker of a natural language can figure out the meaning of 'an arbitrary expression'; 'schema *T*' provides the necessary equipment. For (drawing from the previous quote) it gives the 'necessary and sufficient conditions for the truth of every sentence'. If the necessary and sufficient conditions of a sentence are determinable, then this gives 'the meaning of a sentence.' For Davidson, 'the semantic concept of truth' is the way to know the conditions for the truth of 'any sentence'.

He continues as follows:

Since I think there is no alternative, I have taken an optimistic and programmatic view of the possibilities for a formal characterization of a truth predicate for a natural language. But it must be allowed that a staggering list of difficulties and conundrums remains. To name a few: we do not know the logical form of counterfactual or subjunctive sentences, nor of sentences about probabilities and about causal relations; we have no good idea what the logical role of adverb is, nor the role of attributive adjectives; we have no theory for mass terms like "fire," "water," and "snow," nor for sentences about belief, perception, and intention, nor for verbs of action that imply purpose. And finally, there are all the sentences that seem not to have truth values at all: the imperatives, the optatives, interrogatives, and a host more. A comprehensive theory of a natural language must cope successfully with each of these problems.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Davidson, *op cit.*, 102.

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It is such an approach to language in general, and meaning in particular, that Merleau-Ponty has in mind when he refers to the 'algorithmic' approach to language.<sup>4</sup>

3. Merleau-Ponty

3.1. 'Algorithm' and the Landscape of Language

For Merleau-Ponty, the functional phenomenon of language tells a very different story than the one that Davidson wants to tell. His is a position that finds it necessary to take into account from the beginning not only what he calls the 'paradigm'<sup>5</sup> cases, but also the kinds of expressions that Davidson refers to in his 'staggering list of difficulties and conundrums.' So his position is not one that begins with restrictions and formulae, but rather with a broad recognition of language's varied and queer functions. He speaks of language not as a vessel of meaning,<sup>6</sup> but as a 'being' or a 'universe' in and through which meaning is accessed (or as though the accessing is the meaning).<sup>7</sup>

In his "Specter of a Pure Language", he speaks comparatively of the 'algorithmic' approach and his own in an effort to sketch the problem as he sees it.<sup>8</sup> His general characterization of the 'algorithmic' approach is like this:

Men have been talking for a long time on earth, and yet three-quarters of what they say goes unnoticed. *A rose, it is raining, it is fine, man is mortal.* These are paradigms of expression for us. We believe expression is most complete when it points unequivocally to events, to states of objects, to ideas or relations, for, in

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<sup>4</sup> Davidson, op cit., 95-6. For a favorable treatment of Davidson, see Bjørn T. Ramberg *Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Language* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989), "Convention T" and "What is a Language", 49-63 and 98-113 (respectively), esp. 52ff. For a more able critical evaluation of Davidson see Kirk Ludwig "Theories of Meaning, Truth and Interpretation" as well as Davidson's "Reply to Kirk Ludwig" in *Donald Davidson: Truth, Meaning and Knowledge* (Routledge: 1999), 27-47.

<sup>5</sup> M. Merleau-Ponty "Specter of a Pure Language", trans. John O'Neil, *The Prose of the World* (Northwestern University Press: 2000), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Davidson's position, as was stated, is to 'ask what it is for a theory to give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend on the meaning of words'. The words seem to act as 'vessels'.

<sup>7</sup> cf. "Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence" in *Signs* (Northwestern: 1964), 43. See also Don Ihde "Singing the World: Language and Perception" in *The Horizons of the Flesh* (SIU Press: 1973), 70-1.

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these instances expression leaves nothing more to be desired, contains nothing which it does not reveal, and thus sweeps us toward the object which it designates.<sup>9</sup>

His position, however, views the above as focusing on, presumably, only a quarter of the subject matter; the other 'three-quarters' he characterizes as follows:

In dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature, we possess a second-order language in which we do not speak of objects and ideas except to reach some person. Words respond to words in this language, which bears away within itself and builds up beyond nature a humming, busy world of its own.<sup>10</sup>

The 'algorithmic' approach, for Merleau-Ponty, seems simply to ignore much of what he sees as being essential. Language, for Merleau-Ponty, is expressive in a variety of ways: 'dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature.' Such forms of linguistic expression are more involved than 'man is mortal', for example. Such language does not speak about a certain 'thing', by which he seems to mean 'events, states of objects, ideas or relations', and to approach it as such is to act as if a 'perception' or an 'idea' bears a one-to-one correspondence with a certain 'sign.' This approach, for Merleau-Ponty, is something which we all 'secretly venerate'; but such veneration, for him, is unwarranted in the face of the variety of linguistic expression: "[i]t cannot account for the primitive fact of creative language."<sup>11</sup> He emphasizes what he sees as the contradictory nature of this approach:

Yet we still insist on treating this language as simply a variant of the economical forms of making statements about some *thing*. Thus expression involves nothing more than replacing a perception or an idea with a conventional sign that

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<sup>8</sup> cf. S. B. Mallin *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy* (Yale University Press: 1979), 183.

<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty "Specter", loc. cit.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

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announces, evokes, or abridges it. Of course, language contains more than just ready-made phrases and can refer to what has never yet been seen. . . We all secretly venerate the ideal of a language which in the last analysis would deliver us from language by delivering us to things.<sup>12</sup>

The 'paradigms' of the algorithmic approach allow us to assume that linguistic expression is 'unequivocal'; it is 'unequivocal' if one assumes that the fundamental job of linguistic expression is to replace a certain thought with a certain sign that clearly designates that certain thought and no other (i.e., the sign 'red' for the thought *red*). But these paradigms, for Merleau-Ponty, on the one hand, do not reflect all linguistic expressions, and on the other hand, they take as their primary subject matter not language but thought (or more particularly the relation between thought and thing); as such linguistic expression as a whole (via the portion of expression which is focused on) seems to be ultimately unnecessary. A 'pure language' of the form that Merleau-Ponty criticizes is one that is linguistic in an accidental manner, only because it cannot fully divest itself of language altogether. Language understood in this manner, Merleau-Ponty suggests, is language that is doubly reduced: first it is reduced to the paradigm cases, then it is reduced to insignificance. We are, thus, 'delivered from language by means of being delivered to things.'

This approach, he argues, derives from the perspective of the 'exact sciences'. The assumption, he suggests, is that language as it is used in the exact sciences is 'well-formed', and as such it is a 'mature form of language'. The exact sciences achieve clarity and precision by means of using certain signs that have been given conventional meanings; each sign has a certain signification. As such, there is an interconnected system of sign-signification relations; these relations are explicit and determined. Nothing in the system is to be added implicitly or accidentally. The 'algorithmic' approach assumes the approach of the exact sciences to be the way to properly express thought and avoid ambiguity: language

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<sup>11</sup> Mallin, loc cit.

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used in this manner, for Merleau-Ponty, is clear and precise because there is a kind of direct mapping from thought to sign to signification, or from signification to sign to thought. The goal of the 'algorithmic' approach, Merleau-Ponty suggests, is to establish 'a single system of possible relations' between thought, sign and signification; such a 'system' would establish an unambiguous manner of thought-communication, so that speaker/writer<sub>n</sub> can communicate unambiguously a certain thought<sub>x</sub> to any other speakers/writers<sub>n+1</sub>. More plainly: the 'algorithm', for Merleau-Ponty, seeks to eliminate linguistic ambiguity.

It is frequently repeated that science is a well-formed language. This means also that language is the beginning of science and that algorithm is the mature form of language. . . But if the algorithm is to do its job, if it means to be a rigorous language and to control its moves at every moment, nothing implicit should be introduced. All new and all old relations should form one family, derivable from a single system of possible relations, so that one never means to say more than one does say and no more is said than one means.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of an approach to meaning, this approach assumes, according to Merleau-Ponty, that meaning is more easily determinable (both by way of emphasizing only a small portion of linguistic expression, and by assuming that language is a determinable system of signs which each have a certain signification) than it really is. "The algorithm, the project of a universal language," he says, "is a revolt against language in its existing state and a refusal to depend upon the confusions of everyday language. The algorithm is an attempt to construct language according to the standard of truth, to redefine it to match the divine mind, and to return to the very origin of the history of speech, or, rather, to tear speech out of history."<sup>14</sup> The 'algorithm' sees thought as the source and goal of communication, a thought-to-thought form of communication, not the messy reality of actual

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



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human communication ('dialogue, narrative, plays on words, trust, promise, prayer, eloquence, literature'); in this way, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the 'algorithm' is an 'attempt. . .to redefine [language] to match the divine mind'. For such an approach, "the internal word is the standard of the external word."<sup>15</sup> By this, Merleau-Ponty seems to want to distinguish between a sort of thought-word on the one hand, and a language-word on the other hand: the former in a 'mature form of language' ('algorithm') precisely fixes the meaning of the latter, so that it has a single conventional meaning. The 'sign' itself apart from its conventional meaning is meaningless; or more broadly, Merleau-Ponty sees the algorithm as an affirmation of the insignificance of language as a whole (as we have already noted). We use it only because we cannot communicate in a 'divine' manner by means of direct thought-to-thought communication. Merleau-Ponty's treatment would seem to imply this line of reasoning: since the 'algorithm' views thought rather than language as its subject, then it stands to reason that language would be viewed in a reductive manner by means of emphasizing only that portion of linguistic expression which indeed seems to function 'conventionally', by means of precise thought-to-sign-to-signification relations; linguistic expression in any other form is fully insignificant (because it is ambiguous and thought is, thus, not clearly determinable), whereas linguistic expression of this precise form *is* significant *only because* it establishes a link between the thought (of the speaker/writer) and the thought (of the hearer/reader).

*3.2. Merleau-Ponty's General Comments Concerning His Own View*

For Merleau-Ponty, language is not an explicit and determined system of signs.<sup>16</sup> Language 'resembles' the 'objects' and 'ideas' which it expresses, and which are not conceivable apart from 'words',<sup>17</sup> not as a static predetermined system, but as something which "is the double of being."<sup>18</sup> Linguistic expression

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> cf. *Ibid.* He brings in the notion of 'God'; but it is not clear what he intends by doing so.

<sup>17</sup> cf. Langan *Merleau-Ponty's Critique of Reason* (Yale University Press: 1966), 134.

<sup>18</sup> Merleau-Ponty, op cit., 5. See also Ihde, op cit., 70.

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begins not in speech, but in muteness:<sup>19</sup> one strains "toward what he wants to convey, toward what he is going to say."<sup>20</sup> From this 'place' of muteness (speechlessness)

suddenly a flood of words comes to save this muteness and gives it an equivalent so exact and so capable of yielding the writer's own thought to him when he may have forgotten it, that one can only believe that the thought had been expressed before the world began. Language is there like an all-purpose tool. . . and it always responds to our call, ready to express anything because language is the treasury of everything one may wish to say –because language has all our future experience already written into it, just as the destiny of men is written in the stars. . . All that is required is to meet the phrase ready made in the limbs of language, to recover the muted language in which being murmurs to us.

Language is necessary for us to conceive of things; but the process of expressing a certain conception has an initial stage that is speechless: it is a 'place' of muteness, or silence. What is going to be said has not yet been said; the saying is mute because nothing is being said. In this place of 'muteness', where language is silent, "everything that now exists or will exist prepares itself for being put into words."<sup>21</sup> On the part of the speaker/writer, this effort of 'preparation' is experienced as though there is but a single expression that can adequately express this certain thought; the 'algorithm' has no place for such 'muteness'; for the thought-sign relation is predetermined. When the expression is expressed, when muteness becomes embodied in spoken word, it 'may seem that' the thing as it is presented in word must have had this word in it all along; there seems often to be a kind of seamlessness between the expression and that which is expressed, for Merleau-Ponty, an almost indistinguishable link between an 'expression' and that

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<sup>19</sup> In getting to this point, Merleau-Ponty here cites Jean Paulhan *Les Fleurs de Tarbes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1941), 128; Paulhan, he says, is citing La Bruyère. The quote reads: "Of all the possible expressions which might render our thought, there is only one which is the best. One does not always come upon it in writing or talking: it is nevertheless true that it exists.:"

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

which is expressed; these, he says, 'strangely alternate', and we '*falsely recognize*' "that the *word* has inhabited the thing from all eternity."<sup>22</sup> An expression seems often to fully express that which the writer/speaker has intended; from that place of silence has come the 'flood of words', and one 'feels' that the word which embodies the expression (namely, that which is linguistically expressed) fits the 'thing' so well that it seems to 'inhabit' the thing necessarily ('from all eternity'). The distinction between 'expression' and that which the expression 'expresses' begins to blur; 'what is expression?' and 'what does the expression express?' seem now to ask the same question. This however is an inaccurate assessment. For Merleau-Ponty, the expression is embodied in the word, and this embodied expression is what expresses; the word is not found within the thing, but in a place of muteness. Distinct, for Merleau-Ponty, are two languages: the 'muted language' of the place of silence, and the embodied language of expression (or the expressive language of embodiment).<sup>23</sup>

To emphasize this 'false recognition that the word has inhabited the thing from all eternity' initiates an approach that sees 'communication' as 'involving no mystery', the "word possesses no virtue of its own"; communication becomes fundamentally a process of thought-coding', a 'visible or sonorous' replacement for thought, an 'appearance' that "never brings us anything new"; in such an approach novelty is a 'mirage' for communication: "Such a theory of language would result ultimately (as Paulhan says), in "everything happening between them *as though language had not existed*."<sup>24</sup> Put differently: to emphasize this false recognition is, for Merleau-Ponty, to initiate the 'algorithmic' approach.

### 3.3. Sub-Summary

The position for which Merleau-Ponty argues regarding the 'algorithm' is one that sees language as being fundamentally insignificant, but practically necessary. Language analysis, therefore, emphasizes only that portion of linguistic expression that clearly expresses a thought. For Merleau-Ponty, the emphasis on

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Italics mine. See also Langan, op cit., 136-41.

<sup>23</sup> cf. Ihde, op cit., 71-4.

this type of analysis is interested in language only as a medium to the thought. Thus, language itself has no intrinsic value.

Merleau-Ponty speaks of a 'place' of muteness from which words spring forth as embodied expression. It is this notion of muteness both as source of linguistic expression and as being present within linguistic expression that the next section will treat. My contention is that Merleau-Ponty seems to argue for a position that sees silence as the source of linguistic expression and as the content of linguistic expression as well. We turn now to an examination of some pertinent portions of his "Indirect Language and Voices of Silence."<sup>25</sup>

#### *3.4. Sign and Silence: The Ambiguity of Meaning*

Merleau-Ponty draws some critical notions from Saussure, the most fundamental of which is that the 'sign' bears no meaning in and of itself. Secondly, he adopts the notion that each sign indicates a 'divergence' rather than a distinct meaning. Thirdly, a language is a system of such 'divergences'.<sup>26</sup> These notions characterize an approach that, for Merleau-Ponty, is antithetical to the analytic assumption "that a satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meaning of words."<sup>27</sup> Above, we noted that Merleau-Ponty stresses that the 'algorithmic' approach sunders linguistic expression, and invalidates the role of language; this we could say is a functional analysis. Merleau-Ponty here emphasizes the assumptions of his own position (drawn from Saussure's) that substantiate his view that: (i) words are necessary; (ii) expression begins in muteness (the muted-speech); (iii) expression is embodiment (the expressive language of embodiment).

For Merleau-Ponty, language is neither the sort of thing that we can rightly sunder in terms of its varied means of expressions, nor in terms of breaking a particular expression down to its constitutive words. According to his view of

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<sup>24</sup> Merleau-Ponty, op cit., 7-8.

<sup>25</sup> In *Signs* (Northwestern University Press: 1964), 39-83.

<sup>26</sup> cf. F. de Saussure *Course in General Linguistics*, ed. and trans. by Eiuske Komatsu and George Wolf (Pergamon: 1997). See also A. Rabil, Jr. *Merleau-Ponty: Existentialist of the Social World* (Columbia University Press: 1967), 197-204.

<sup>27</sup> Davidson, op cit., 92.

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'algorithm', expression (speech) is inextricably united to that which it expresses (speaks), and unity is inextricably united to the whole of language. Linguistic expression (speech), for Merleau-Ponty, is meaningful insofar as it expresses within this whole, not as part of the whole but as a part-whole, which could be said of the 'algorithmic' approach as well.<sup>28</sup> But, for Merleau-Ponty, signs interrelate with one another in linguistic expression (speech) not only in a certain linguistic expression (speech-acts), but concurrently with the whole of language as well. For Merleau-Ponty, this implies, contrary to the algorithmic approach, that the meaning of expression (speech) begins with a certain expression (speech-act), but it 'is never completed'. To be 'completed' the expression (speech) as part of the whole of language and the varied nature of both expression (speech) and sign would have to incorporate into itself the entirety of the whole. This for Merleau-Ponty is impossible: "We always have to do only with sign structures whose meaning, being nothing other than the way in which the signs behave toward one another and are distinguished from one another, cannot be set forth independently of them."<sup>29</sup> Thus, a linguistic sign bears no meaning in and of itself.

The interrelation of the signs with one another implies, for Merleau-Ponty, that linguistic meaning is the sort of thing that 'appears' at 'intersections' of divergence. Meaning is the effect of the negative interaction between signs; it arises not from this sign or that sign but from the 'intervals between' signs. It is the product of the 'lateral relation' of signs interrelating with signs: "Since the sign has meaning only insofar as it is profiled against other signs, its meaning is entirely involved in language."<sup>30</sup> From the source of language linguistic expression (speech) is produced; from the source of linguistic expression (speech), meaning is produced. The sequence is a kind of circle: the meaning is only meaningful within the interrelation of the signs of the expression (speech), and the signs of the expression (speech) are only meaningful within the larger whole of language: the latter remains fully part of the first, the first fully part of the latter.

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<sup>28</sup> But Merleau-Ponty's treatment doesn't seem to recognize this.

<sup>29</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *op cit.*, 42.

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Speech always comes into play against a background of speech; it is always only a fold in the immense fabric of language. . . There is thus an opaqueness of language. Nowhere does it stop and leave a place for pure meaning; it is always limited only by more language, and meaning appears within it only set in a context of words. Like a charade, language is understood only through the interaction of signs, each of which, taken separately, is equivocal or banal, and makes sense only by being combined with others.<sup>31</sup>

From the interrelatedness of signs we get the 'divergent' sense of meaning: meaning which is meaning by saying what it is not.

There is no predetermined sign-signification relationship 'technique' because 'signification' is created "at the intersection of linguistic gestures."<sup>32</sup> The process, for Merleau-Ponty, is like this: from the silence of thought arises the expressive language of embodiment (speech). For this process, though, there is no 'model' which delineates the relation of this thought to these signs to that signification; it is describable in this general sense, but one cannot say how this 'ciphering' occurs, or (on the other hand) how this 'deciphering' occurs; it does occur, for Merleau-Ponty, but by means of silence, as it were, not by preconditioned convention. Put differently: thought (i.e., the muted speech) "before it finds the words which express it" is "a sort of ideal text that our sentences attempt to *translate*"<sup>33</sup> into the expressive language of embodiment (speech); the genesis of speech is not a language to which the writer/speaker or reader/hearer is able afterwards to 'compare' what he has written/said or read/heard; an acceptable form of expression is reached by means of being conditioned by speech; it is a goal for which there is 'no model'.

Language, for Merleau-Ponty, is not the sort of thing that we examine from the outside, determine its rules and regulations, as it were, like a sport that we are unfamiliar with, and then engage it after having studied the 'rule book'

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 42-3.

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when we feel more comfortable with the game. We know the rules of the game, as it were, only by playing the game (but language, for Merleau-Ponty, is more than a mere game). We say this or that, using such-and-such signs to signify thus-and-such not by model, but from the source of silence: 'signs' relate to 'signs' as beings relate to beings. We know this being from that being because of the way that it lives in contradistinction to other beings; so too do we know language only as it lives, only as its parts diverge in speech. Linguistic meaning is not separable from this "total movement of speech."<sup>34</sup> It is this mysterious movement that is the actualization of meaning, and it seems that it could even be said that, for Merleau-Ponty, this movement is itself meaning.<sup>35</sup> Meaning for Merleau-Ponty cannot be reduced to the semantic value of this sign, the next sign and the next, and so on; a sign has no meaning if viewed in this manner: for it is abstracted from that context which is its meaning. Meaning is not 'pure' in this sense: it is a messy affair; the inter-relation between signs which is linguistic meaning is created out of silence.<sup>36</sup> One speaks or writes and does not have recourse to a text with which he can compare what he has said or written (as we noted above): for speech is born of the travail of silence being spoken. What is meant by speaking or writing something is meant from silence into the confusion of the inter-relation of signs. In this way it seems that Merleau-Ponty affirms that the 'being' of language speaks from silence.

It seems consistent with Merleau-Ponty's thought to propose that meaning is the creation of speech from silence: and this, it seems, is not a clearly defined method, but a relational process. The process seems relational on two scores: (i) thought (muted speech) is related to sign; (ii) signs are related to signs (speech acts to speech acts). The first form of relation is the initial stage of embodying thought; the second is the expression (speaking) of embodied thought. This is, it seems, for Merleau-Ponty, what we could call the meaning making process. The thought is brought into the 'being' of language, and it is made to become part of

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> cf. Ihde, *op cit.*, 71.

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this 'being' by virtue of embodying it in linguistic expression (speech): an embodied thought, for Merleau-Ponty, is a thought which has been made to be meaningful. An analogy suggests itself: as the body takes in sustenance and makes it part of itself, so too does language take thought into itself and make it part of itself. The body makes sense out of bread, fish and wine by uniting itself with these things, by transforming them into itself; thought is similarly consumed by language.<sup>37</sup> This perspective on meaning implies that linguistic 'expression' (speech) can never fully actualize that which it intends to express: meaning is partial, never whole.

Now if we rid our minds of the idea that our language is the translation or cipher of original text, we shall see that the idea of complete expression is nonsensical, and that all language is indirect or allusive –that it is, if you wish, silence. The relation of meaning to the spoken word can no longer be a point for point correspondence that we always have clearly in mind.<sup>38</sup>

What does Merleau-Ponty mean when he says 'all language is indirect or allusive'? This characterizes for him the defining character of language as a whole. But does it say anything? It certainly seems to, in my opinion. We speak of something as being 'indirect' or 'allusive' because of the way that it seems to act; language, then, we could say acts in indirect and allusive ways. As a 'being' or a 'universe', language lives in secretive ways; its ethics are its own secrets; it does not tell of all its deeds. To borrow from Heraclitus, for Merleau-Ponty it seems that language 'prefers to hide'. In this sense, silence is the source of linguistic expression (speech) and also its sustenance: it is secretive in its 'translation' of thought into linguistic expression (speech), and remains secretive in the manner of its expression (speech). Language does not reveal its secret abilities; it tells no tales of how it embodies thought, or how signs diverge to reveal meaning. About

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> cf. Merleau-Ponty, *op cit.*, 43.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



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these language remains silent. Whatever meaning of a natural language is, it seems consistent with Merleau-Ponty's thought to suggest that it is kataphatic because it affirms, apophatic because it denies and silent because silence is anterior and essential to it: language affirms through the embodiment of thought into the form of certain signs and a certain linguistic expression (speech act), but at the same time it denies other forms of linguistic expression and others signs; likewise, signs deny signs while affirming what it is that they together are intended to mean. As has been noted, meaning is not something that is fundamentally linguistic in terms of being locatable in the atomic structures of sentences (words) nor in their connective logical structures. The 'confusions of everyday language', for Merleau-Ponty, cannot be left untreated if indeed an account of meaning is to be responsible, which, taken as he here suggests, implies that meaning is silence at least in part.

There appears a comment in his "Dialogue and the Perception of the Other" that might be helpful for us to recall here. His comments here focus on the queer unitive nature of linguistic communication, and the effort of some to 'silence' this inexplicable manner in which language acts. Here we have Merleau-Ponty speaking of silence in a manner that is antithetical to the way that we have just observed; here 'silence' does not describe the secretive ways of language; but the philosophical effort to ignore these ways.

In speech we realize the impossible agreement between two rival totalities not because speech forces us back upon ourselves to discover some unique spirit in which we participate but because speech concerns us, catches us indirectly, seduces us, trails us along, transforms us into the other and him into us, abolishes the limit between mine and not-mine, and ends the alternative between what has sense for me and what is non-sense for me, between me as subject and the other as object. It is well that some people try to set up obstacles to the intrusion of this spontaneous power and oppose it with their rigor and ill will. But their silence

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ends in further words, and rightly so. There is no silence that is pure attention and that, having begun nobly, remains equal to itself.<sup>39</sup>

It would seem that what Merleau-Ponty affirms here could be put like this: language usage (speech) is the meeting of subject with subject, a meeting which itself is a creative aspect of who these subjects are becoming; one cannot abstain from this fray of inter-subjective linguistic communion; the attempt to abstain in silence, to be an individual subject apart from relating to other subjects yet witnesses to the nature of silence, which is communal and therefore must speak: "Language is not private -nor is it public- it is between subjects, intersubjective, it is "a synchronizing of my own existence, a transformation of my own being. [But] [w]e live in a world where speech is an *institution*."<sup>40</sup> Meaning it seems is a developmental process, for Merleau-Ponty: it is not an exact something.<sup>41</sup> This inexactness seems to derive from his conception of the anteriority and essentiality of silence to language, and it suggests that language usage (speech) is an essentially creative endeavor that is always bound to the 'embodiment of word': meaning wears a textual garb as an 'incarnation.' But for Merleau-Ponty, the effort to 'silence' language as described here results only in further speech, which witnesses to the silence of language as Merleau-Ponty sees it because speech 'ends the alternative between me and the other'; thus 'silence' even in this instance speaks. Either way, silence is meaning. Silence, for Merleau-Ponty denotes more of a presence rather than the usual notion of absence -the presence of meaning.

*4. Denys' 'Sculptor Analogy' and Language-as-Ikon*

Interrelatedness between signs is, for Merleau-Ponty, a relational process of linguistic-meaning creation from and by means of silence. This process, as I

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<sup>39</sup> cf. "Science and the Expression of Experience" in *Prose*, op cit., 45-6. "We should be sensitive to the thread of silence from which the tissue of speech is woven." See also *Indirect Language and Voices of Silence*, op cit., 43-4. Quote from "Dialogue and the Perception of the Other" in *Prose*, op cit., 145-6.

<sup>40</sup> *Ihde*, op cit., 70. Quote from *Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 183-4.

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have suggested, seems to imply a kind of kataphaticism as well as an apophaticism because the embodiment of thought affirms, on the one hand, certain signs and a certain linguistic expression, while concurrently denying, on the other hand, various other signs and linguistic expressions. This notion of interrelatedness as the process of linguistic-meaning creation which is simultaneously kataphatic and apophatic, taken in terms of language-as-ikon, suggests a conception of language that seems to be analogous in some ways to Denys' conception of the creative work of theology as a kind of 'sculpting'.

Language in speaking from silence inherently bears silence within its locutions, and this, for Merleau-Ponty, is the way that we communicate. There is always, then, the presence of the mystery of the ineffable,<sup>42</sup> for Merleau-Ponty, residing in that which is spoken. Thus, when language speaks it does so in an explicit-implicit manner: it speaks yet in speaking it is silent.<sup>43</sup>

Denys' view of the nature of language-as-ikon, implies that language speaks yet remains silent, as well; but it does so because the beyond-being reveals but remains hidden. His position offers an explanatory context for Merleau-Ponty's theory of language by means of interpreting the notion of interrelatedness in terms of the notion of language-as-ikon. This means that, Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'ineffable', which is apparently purely phenomenological for him, is interpreted, from a Dionysian perspective, in terms of the manifold manifestation of the beyond-being in the ikon of language.

Denys' 'sculptor analogy', as we have seen, describes a creative process that is both kataphatic and apophatic, which is, I suggest, the sort of thing that Merleau-Ponty's position seems to do. The medium here, however, as opposed to that of the theologian (chapter One and Two), the rationalist philosopher (chapter Three), the empiricist philosopher (chapter Four), for example, is language, and

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<sup>41</sup> cf. "The Algorithm and the Mystery of Language" in *Prose*, 127-9.

<sup>42</sup> For Merleau-Ponty this does not seem to necessarily imply a sort of 'transcendental' ineffable; whereas in a Dionysian system it would imply this. The mysterious presence in a Dionysian system would be taken to mean the presence of the beyond-being.

<sup>43</sup> cf. Ihde, *op cit.*, 73.

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that which is the aim of production, as it were, is meaning. The analogy is, by now, a familiar one, but we shall present it one last time. Denys maintains that the theologian would be 'just as the ones creating (*ποιοῦντες*) a statue of natural things, removing everything that is an obstruction to the true sight of that which is hidden, and revealing this hidden beauty by means of negation alone' (*MT* II, 1025b).

If we take Merleau-Ponty's notion of interrelatedness in terms of this analogy, the result is that 'the linguistic phenomenologist philosopher would be just as the ones creating (*ποιοῦντες*) a statue of natural things, removing everything that is an obstruction to the true sight of that which is hidden, and revealing this hidden beauty by means of negation alone.' Such an interpretation seems to be warranted because, as I have argued, Merleau-Ponty's notion of interrelatedness is a relational process of linguistic-meaning creation that creates from and by means of silence in a kataphatic and apophatic manner. According to Merleau-Ponty's notion, one creates a linguistic expression with signs by removing the obstruction of other signs and expressions. This, in Merleau-Ponty's terminology, then, is the 'embodied thought', which is linguistic meaning as an inexact creation. The element of silence, for Merleau-Ponty, is the source of meaning's inexactness, and, as we have noted, this silence seems to be accepted as a phenomenological aspect of language. Denys' position, however, adds a theological interpretation to this phenomenological notion, namely the notion that language, since it is ikonic, speaks from and by means of silence because of the immanent presence of the beyond-being. On this reading, therefore, I am suggesting that Merleau-Ponty provides an attractive philosophical account of the being of language to which Denys' position offers a theological support through the notion of the being of language-as-ikon. I am not, therefore, suggesting that their respective notions of silence and ineffability are the same because (i) I take Merleau-Ponty's notion of silence and ineffability to be an accurate description of language *qua* language; but (ii) I take Denys' notion of silence and ineffability as an accurate description of language *qua* language-as-ikon. The first type of silence

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and ineffability is, as Merleau-Ponty argues, an aspect of the way that we use language; Denys' notion of ineffability and silence speaks of the presence of the beyond-being. The notion of language-as-ikon, moreover, according to Dionysian thought, affirms Merleau-Ponty's notion of silence and ineffability, while bringing to it an explanatory context of the silence and ineffability of the presence of the beyond-being. Although the two notions are different, then, the first is, nevertheless, an ikon of the second in the sense of being, according to Denys' position, dissimilarly similar. Merleau-Ponty's notion of silence and ineffability, to put it differently, is a dissimilar linguistic-ikon of Denys' notion of silence and ineffability, i.e. as a mysterious element of the being of language, it affirms the mystery of the being of language, and in affirming the mystery of the being of language, it 'un-forgets' the nature of language. The nature of language, from a Dionysian perspective, is bound up with the manifestation of the beyond-being. Merleau-Ponty's notion of interrelatedness, creatively dependent as it is on silence and ineffability, if taken solely in terms of referring to the being of language, is, therefore, a philosophical position which seems to lend credence to Denys' notion of language-as-ikon.

*4.1. Language-as-Ikon and Denys' Notion of Praise*

For Denys, as we noted in chapter One, 'the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated' (589d-592a). The speaking of language, for Denys, is, therefore, as we argued in the first chapter, a speaking that speaks what cannot be spoken by means of what can be spoken. The beyond-being is 'bound up' within empirical and rational being, i.e. the beyond-being which is beyond the empirical and the rational, is 'bound' by it. In relation to this notion, I argued, that for Denys there is a distinction between showing and praising, and that his ultimate purpose is 'not to show the beyond-being, as it were, but 'to praise' it (*DN*, 5, 1, 816b). His aim in speaking the beyond-being is not to explicate the essence of beyond-being, therefore, but to praise it in its manifestations by means of 'whatever appropriate ikons' (*DN* I, 592c). This means, as I have argued in chapter One, that *being* (*linguistic being*, specifically, in terms of the present discussion) in all of its

various hierarchical manifestations, whether it, according to its capacity, manifests the beyond-being in a similar or in a dissimilar manner, is viewed as an 'appropriate ikon of the Divine'. I argued that to speak of the beyond-being, for Denys, is 'to praise' it in two senses of the word: because language-as-ikon celebrates the beyond-being, and because it recites over and over the presence of the beyond-being. These 'senses' are distinct but inseparable whether speaking explicitly about the beyond-being or not because language-as-ikon itself is beautiful-being-of-language-as-ikon-of-the-beauty-of-the-beyond-being, i.e. language *qua* language-as-ikon by its nature as being and by its capacity for manifesting the beyond-being simultaneously celebrates and recites the beyond-being. It can be said, then, in terms of Merleau-Ponty's thought that 'the inexpressible is bound up with what can be articulated', but taken in terms of Denys' notion of language-as-ikon, this 'inexpressible' aspect of language, is described in terms of the manifest presence of the beyond-being. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language, understood iconically, speaks in praise of the beyond-being because it 'enables one to see', as Denys argues in *Ep.* IX, 'the hidden beauty'. 'Mystery', Denys maintains, 'will be found, all divine, having been reformed from much theological light' (1104c-1105c).

##### *5. Conclusion*

Merleau-Ponty's theory of language apart from a Dionysian interpretation is, in my opinion, as I have suggested above, a very attractive one, and his evaluation of the 'algorithmic' theory, or analytic thought, though somewhat overstated at times, is in my estimation fundamentally accurate. But neither his criticism of analytic thought, nor his own theory *per se* necessarily implies the sort of metaphysic that Denys' notion of ikon requires. If my evaluation of his theory is accurate, however, with regard specifically to my claim that his thought is of an apophatic form in part, then interpreting his theory in terms of Denys' apophatic theory which requires the notion of ikon seems naturally to suggest itself. It also seems to provide a theoretical context by means of which, therefore, to defend Denys' notion of language-as-ikon. Seen through the lens of Denys' ikon,

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Merleau-Ponty's theory of language can be accepted both as an apparently valid phenomenological analysis of the mystery of language, on the one hand, but also as tacitly manifesting the mystery of the beyond-being. Herein lies my defense of Denys' notion of language-as-ikon: if Merleau-Ponty's theory really does tell us something about the mystery of the 'being' of language, then it, according to Denys' position, necessarily tells us something about the beyond-being as well, though the theory itself might not do so explicitly. For, according to Dionysian thought, insofar as the mystery of being, in this case language, is revealed, so too is the mystery of the beyond-being revealed because of the nature of being-as-ikon.

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Atticus said to Jem one day. 'I'd rather you shoot at tin cans in the back yard, but I know you'll go after birds. Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit 'em, but remember it's a sin to kill a mockingbird.

Harper Lee *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### *1. Why Denys' notion of the mystery of being-as-ikon in the first place?*

Byzantine theology developed during a thousand year period, roughly from about A.D. 500 on into the 1500's. This period is for the Orthodox East an important time of theological development and synthesis. For it was during this era that philosophical, dogmatic and ascetical thought began to be drawn together as distinct aspects of a single theological system. Dionysius the Areopagite appears early in this tradition and is the first to offer a kind of 'systematic' theology in which the philosophical, the dogmatic and the ascetical are each equally important aspects of the whole system. His theology later influenced major Byzantine theologians, for example, John of Scythopolis, Maximos the Confessor, John of Damascus, Gregory Palamas and the much lesser known philosopher/statesmen/theologian Michael Psellos. But his work was even more influential in the west. Among those indebted to him are: Gregory the Great, John Scotus Eriugena (who produced a Latin translation of the *CD*), Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart, the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, John of the Cross, and the structure of the hierarchies of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, for example. It is, therefore, for these reasons, first of all, namely because Dionysius is a 'source' for Byzantine theology, particularly, and for philosophical theology more generally (though this latter point has, in contemporary scholarship, been almost completely unexamined), that I have turned to his notion of mystery in this thesis.

I have been interested, however, not in a 'historical', but in a 'constructive' investigation of his thought, primarily from an epistemological perspective, which makes an effort at application to certain western philosophical issues. It has been necessary for me, therefore, to ignore fundamentally both his



philosophical and theological heritage as well as his 'Byzantine' and 'Medieval' legacy, and to focus my attention on a task that is, in my opinion, fundamentally Dionysian, as it were, namely that of interpreting contemporaneous philosophical thought in terms of his cosmic vision.

Secondly, Denys' notion of being-as-ikon as 'an image which itself contains as a unity-in-distinction that of which it is an image', namely that being (as defined in chapter One) in every manifestation is such an image, provides a unique conceptual framework for a philosophical theology that is able to deal with various claims of mystery, theistic proof, the sense of the beautiful and the role of silence in language. It is unique, primarily, because of its adherence to an epistemology that is both rational and empirical *and* trans-rational and trans-empirical, and as such, is able to draw together a well-defined theology with philosophical reflection by means of making sense of the latter as a discrete and manifold instantiation of a larger whole. Furthermore, this 'drawing together', or *synaxis* as Denys would call it, of philosophy and theology is accomplished through the notion of being-as-ikon without dealing with either of them unfavorably.

Denys' notion of being-as-ikon envisions the cosmos and the Cause of the cosmos as being united, though not identical, and in constant participation *via* the process of relational beauty. Since I have approached Dionysian thought primarily as a 'philosopher', rather than as a 'theologian', my interests in terms of applying this notion have naturally tended toward philosophical, rather than theological thought. In this thesis the notion of being-as-ikon has been put to use primarily in terms of dealing with epistemological and linguistic mystery.

I have not spent any time examining, for example, the question of Denys' doctrine of the Trinity or of a Dionysian Christology or Ecclesiology, though these notions are central to his conception of being-as-ikon. The incarnation of the second person of the Trinity (i.e., the 'Son') and the church, for Denys, are indeed the full manifestations of being-as-ikon. The transformation of being into a single organic whole is, for example, accomplished most fully in the incarnation, when

the beyond-being fully unites itself with being by means of becoming a human being; and the fullness of *this* work is carried out continuously in the ecclesial life of the church, most clearly manifest in the *synaxis* of the Eucharist. The need for such a transformation is the result of, according to Dionysian thought, being's dis-union, which, as I understand it, is what 'evil' is for Denys (cf. *DN* IV 732c.3-732d.15). This 'dis-union' is the state of un-purified, un-enlightened being, i.e. being devoid of the purpose of harmony and wholeness (i.e. beauty), like a song being sung out-of-tune and out-of-order. Being's purpose, for Denys, is to participate (i.e., 'to know being-as-ikon') and to praise (i.e., 'to speak being-as-ikon'). More precisely: *human* being's purpose is to know and speak being-as-ikon, by means of the process of relational beauty, as 'an image which itself contains as a unity-in-distinction that of which it is an image', and so, by this means, to become 'united', i.e. a 'divinized' human being, with the beyond-being. Being's participation and praise, as such, unites cosmos and creator, the image with its archetype, as it were, which, for Denys, is the proper purpose of being as *ecclesia*,<sup>1</sup> i.e. of being as an assembly of those calling back in response to the call of the beyond-being. The actualization of interdependent cosmic unity, therefore, according to Denys' position, is realized as being pursues its purpose of knowing and speaking the beyond-being, by means of beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being, in the assembly which is responsively calling back to the calling of the beyond-being.

2. *But given this framework, then, what is the purpose of the 'philosophical' chapters (i.e., Three-Six)?*

Denys speaks in *Ep.* IX of the two ways of doing theology, namely by demonstration and by silence. By the former, I understand him to mean what would commonly be referred to in contemporary discussions as 'philosophical theology'; by the latter, I understand him to mean 'mystical theology'. His own writings seem to emphasize the latter. My treatment has shown, however, that,

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<sup>1</sup> From ἐκκαλέω (ἐκ 'from out of', 'away from' καλέω 'to call'): 'to call out of', 'to call forth'. In Dionysian terminology: 'to call being out of being *qua* being' or 'to call being forth to being *qua* being-as-ikon'. Usually translated as 'church' in Eng.

while one way may be emphasized, the two ways are not separable. The actualization of interdependent cosmic unity, the nature of which I have just described, is realized, therefore, both in terms of 'mystical theology' and in terms of 'philosophical theology'. Thus, the conclusion of the previous paragraph could be reformulated as follows: the actualization of interdependent cosmic unity is realized as *human* being philosophically pursues its purpose of knowing and speaking the beyond-being, by means of beautiful-being-as-ikon-of-the-beyond-being, as an assembly which is responsively calling back to the calling of the beyond-being, the ultimate purpose of which is the mystical union of *human* being with the beyond-being.

Chapter Three, therefore, addresses the problem of knowing and speaking the beyond-being in the face of a variety of philosophical claims of mystery by means of viewing these 'mysteries' as fundamentally theological in nature, or, more precisely, as ikons. Denys' notion of being-as-ikon is able to receive these claims as mysteries of being, and, thus, to affirm them as ikons.

Chapters Four through Six each also present responses to philosophical problems of interest to philosophical theology in general and to Dionysian thought (or at least *my* interest therein) in particular. These problems, as was noted in the Prolegomena, conceived of in the most general terms, are: the problem of the relationship between theistic proof and theology, the problem of the relationship between science and theology and the problem of the relationship between language and theology. From the perspective of Denys' notion of ikon, these chapters address the problem of knowing and speaking the beyond-being in terms of 'proof', 'science' and 'language'. The responses to these problems are put in a 'theological' context, therefore, and, by this means, Denys' notions of rational, empirical and linguistic ikon are defended.

My fundamental claim with regard to the application of Dionysian thought, is that by invoking the notion of being-as-ikon, a notion which at once maintains the mystery-of-being and the mystery of beyond-being as distinct but inseparable aspects of itself, these philosophical issues, or more particularly these

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certain responses, are 'illuminated' as mysteries of being which are interpreted in terms of the mystery of being-as-ikon.

But my treatment in chapters Four-Six is warranted, furthermore, because of the tacit element of apophaticism that I discern in them apart from Dionysian thought. And my defense of Dionysian thought, concerning these chapters in particular, lies in this discernment of apophaticism, which I interpret in the context of his notion of being-as-ikon in relation to the apophasis of 'sculpting' and the process of relational beauty. To invoke Denys' notion of being-as-ikon, using Marcel's terminology once more, is, therefore, to postulate the primacy of being-as-ikon over knowledge. . .to recognize that knowledge is, as it were, environed by the mystery of being-as-ikon.

### *3. What is the outcome of the thesis?*

I have shown that my interpretation of Denys' theophanic notion of being, which I have spoken of as being-as-ikon, is a plausible view of being from which new lines of thought emerge, when applied to western philosophical thought, that uniquely address some important problems in philosophical theology. By examining this notion in the context of western philosophy, I have, therefore, offered a defense of Denys' notion of being-as-ikon by positing it as a plausible interpretation of the mystery of rational, empirical and linguistic being. In chapter three, I have done this kataphatically, and in the ensuing chapters I have done this in an apophatic manner. Thus, I have developed a Dionysian philosophical theology through the notion of being-as-ikon in dialogue with western philosophy.

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